

CAMP SIX

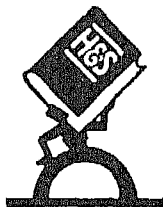
THE BOOKS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| GOOD-BYE FOR THE PRESENT | ELEANOR AGLAND |
| WORLDS WITHOUT END | THE ASTRONOMER ROYAL |
| | (H. SPENCER JONES) |
| THIS TORCH OF FREEDOM | STANLEY BALDWIN |
| OUR INHERITANCE | STANLEY BALDWIN |
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| A WINDOW IN THRUMS | J. M. BARRIE |
| MARGARET OULVY | J. M. BARRIE |
| DEAR BRUTUS | J. M. BARRIE |
| QUALITY STREET | J. M. BARRIE |
| NO SECOND SPRING | JANET BEITH |
| THE KING'S GRACE | JOHN BUCHAN |
| MONTROSE | JOHN BUCHAN |
| THROUGH JADE GATE AND CENTRAL ASIA | MILDRED CABLE AND FRANCESCA |
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| TEAR WALLAH | REGINALD CAMPBELL |
| MY MYSTERY SHIPS | VICE-ADMIRAL GORDON CAMPBELL |
| THE LEISURE OF AN EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL | LORD EDWARD CECIL |
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| GREAT MOTHER FOREST | ATTILIO GATTI |
| IN QUEST OF THE SUN | ALAIN GERBAULT |
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| THE CHARM OF BIRDS | LORD GREY OF FALLODON |
| THE VANISHED POMS OF YESTERDAY | LORD FREDERIC HAMILTON |
| THE DAYS BEFORE YESTERDAY | LORD FREDERIC HAMILTON |
| HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE | LORD FREDERIC HAMILTON |
| GOOD-BYE, MR. CHIPS | JAMES HILTON |
| A CHINESE LADY | LADY HOSIE |
| ENGLAND | DEAN INGE |
| TIBETAN TREK | RONALD KAULBACK |
| MAKING OF MAN | SIR OLIVER LODGE |
| THE HOME OF THE BLIZZARD | SIR DOUGLAS MAWSON |
| ESSENTIALS OF GOLF | ADE MITCHELL |
| FEAR AND BE SLAIN | LORD MOTTISTONE (GENERAL |
| | SEELY) |
| MYSTIC ISLES OF THE SOUTH SEAS | FREDERICK O'BRIEN |
| HENRIETTA MARIA | CAROLA OMAN |
| MY LADIE DUNDIE | KATHERINE PARKER |
| THE DIARY OF RUSSELL BERESFORD | CECIL ROBERTS |
| FOR SINNERS ONLY | A. J. RUSSELL |
| EVEREST, 1933 | HUGH RUTLEDGE |
| ON THE EDGE OF THE PRIMEVAL FOREST | ALBERT SCHWEITZER |
| BOZZOI | IGOR SCHWYZOFF |
| GINO WATKINS | J. M. SCOTT |
| ARCTIC JOURNEYS | EDWARD SHACKLETON |
| NANDA DEVI | ERIC SHIPTON |
| KAMET CONQUERED | F. S. SMYTHIE |
| CAMP SIX | F. S. SMYTHIE |
| THE SPIRIT OF THE HILLS | F. S. SMYTHIE |
| OVER TYROLESE HILLS | F. S. SMYTHIE |
| AFTER EVEREST | T. HOWARD SOMERVELL |
| ENDLESS STORY | TAFFRAIL |
| THIS WAS ENGLAND | H. A. VACHELL |
| THE NEW TESTAMENT IN MODERN SPEECH | R. F. WEYMOUTH |

F. S. SMYTHE

CAMP SIX

AN ACCOUNT OF THE
1933 MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION



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PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE 1933 Mount Everest Expedition, compiled from a diary which accompanied me to the highest camps, and is published by permission of the Mount Everest Committee.

As a personal account of a large expedition cannot do justice to the expedition as a whole, the reader who desires a more comprehensive account is referred to the official book of the Expedition, "Everest 1933," by Hugh Rutledge.

There have been seven expeditions to Mount Everest, of which two were primarily reconnaissances. The 1933 Expedition was the fourth and, like the 1924 Expedition, it came very near to success. Its members were:

HUGH RUTLEDGE (LEADER).	J. L. LONGLAND.
E. O. SHEBBEARE.	DR. W. McLEAN.
C. G. CRAWFORD.	ERIC E. SHIPTON.
CAPTAIN E. ST. J. BIRNIE.	LIEUT. W. R. SMIJTH-WINDHAM.
MAJOR HUGH BOUSTEAD.	F. S. SMYTHE.
T. A. BROCKLEBANK.	LIEUT. E. C. THOMPSON.
DR. C. RAYMOND GREENE.	L. R. WAGER.
P. WYN HARRIS.	GEORGE WOOD-JOHNSON.

The memories of physical hardship are fortunately so illusive that it almost seems to me that my diary exaggerates. Did we really have such an

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unpleasant time in 1933? Perhaps in this connection I may mention the diary of a former Everest climber. Above the Base Camp his description of the day's events is said to be prefaced invariably by the words "Another bloody day."

It is instinctive with man to want to dominate his environment and Everest is one of the last great problems left to him on the surface of this Earth. In solving this problem he adds to his scientific knowledge, and enjoys a physical and spiritual adventure.

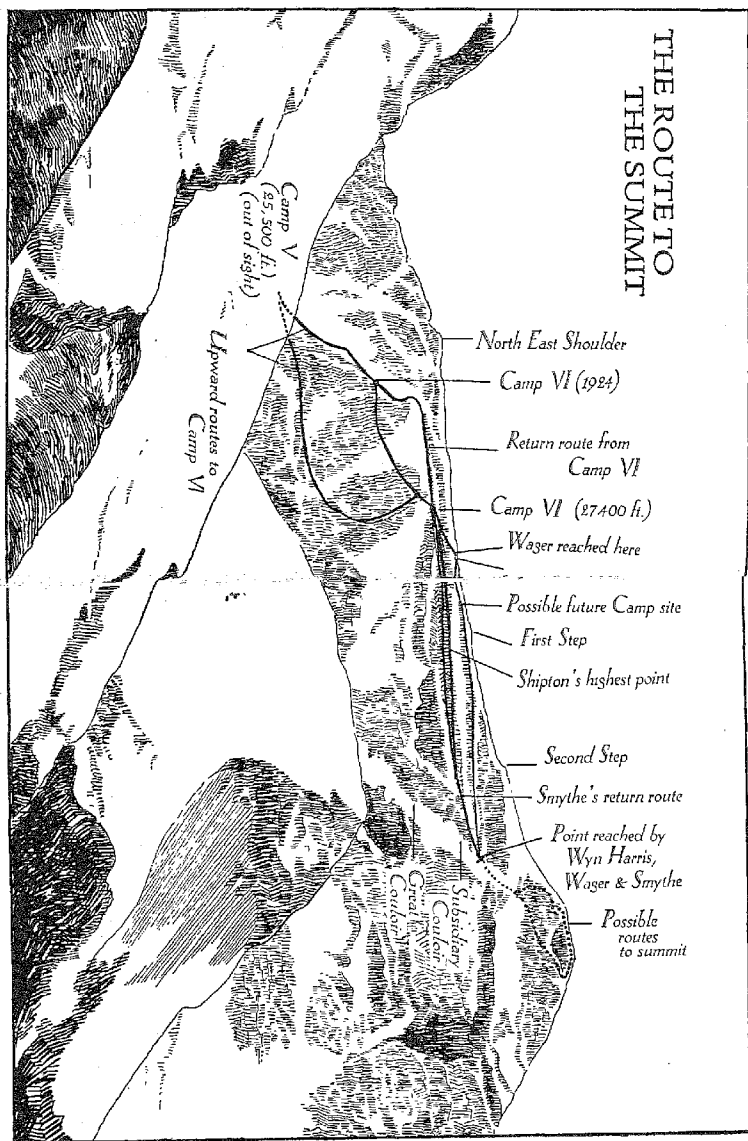
That Everest will be climbed cannot be doubted; it may be next year or a generation hence. Every expedition adds to our knowledge of the problem, yet, in the end, the climber depends for success on the casting vote of fortune. There are three problems inherent in the ascent. Firstly, the difficulty of the mountain, which is considerable at a height of 28,000 feet; secondly, the altitude and, thirdly, the weather. Skill and knowledge may solve the first two, but the last will always remain an incalculable factor. The weather defeated the 1933 and 1936 expeditions, though it remains to be proved that men can live in the rarified air above 28,000 feet without some artificial aid.

Lastly, no reference to the Everest problem, however brief, is complete which does not mention the Sherpa and Bhotia porters. Their work has brought us very near to success, and the story of their courage and devotion should stand out in letters of gold when the last chapter in the struggle comes to be written.

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THE ROUTE TO THE SUMMIT



CHAPTER I

DARJEELING

CALCUTTA IS HOT EVEN IN FEBRUARY. THOUGH sorry to part from many hospitable friends, I was glad to begin the last stage of my journey from England to Darjeeling.

It was a stuffy night to begin with in the "Darjeeling Mail," and ravenous mosquitoes interfered with my slumbers, but towards dawn the temperature fell and cool, refreshing airs rushed in at the window.

As the train neared Siliguri the sky lightened with a quick rush of rosy tints and little pools of water opened calm eyes in the paddy fields of the Bengal plain.

I peered from the window into the dim hill-filled north, and there, high up in the sky, I saw a tiny point of golden light. During the few seconds that it was visible before a curve took it from sight it grew larger. It was the summit of Kangchenjunga, nearly one hundred miles distant.

At Siliguri, the foothills meet the plain, and the hillman the plainsman. Half of those on the platform were languid Bengalis, the other half energetic, slant-eyed, broad-faced, high-cheeked

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Tibetans; smooth-skinned, quiet-mannered Lepchas from Sikkim, and tough little Sherpas from Nepal, their brows furrowed as though from the strain of staring into great distances, and their eyebrows puckered from the snow-glare of the passes. Traders, beggars, Lama pilgrims, rickshaw wallahs from Darjeeling and little Nepali women from the tea plantations, with gay-coloured blouses and cone-shaped wicker baskets on their backs; all were cheerful, all ready to show their teeth in a broad grin.

I breakfasted, then ascended to Darjeeling by the world-renowned Himalayan Railway. So wide are the carriages that they seem likely to over-balance on the narrow-gauge line. A brave little engine draws the train, but it would not succeed in climbing the steeper gradients without two men stationed on the front to pour sand on the rails.

First along the plain, fussed the train, then into the sub-tropical forests that extend for scores of miles along the foothills of the Himalayas. One minute, we were on the level, the next we were climbing steeply uphill.

After the placid, less secretive beauties of English woodlands, these Himalayan forests are strangely impressive. Sunlight rarely penetrates their dense foliage, beneath which all manner of rank shrubs struggle despairingly upwards towards the sunlight; giant creepers embrace the moss-clad trees in an octopus-like grip, and epiphytic ferns, proof of the humid climate, hang from the branches in lank green tendrils, so that the traveller fancies himself walking on an ocean floor amid pendent

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masses of seaweed. In each great tree dwells a colony of birds and insects, and there is a constant whirring and humming as though countless sewing machines and sawmills were being worked by invisible hands.

Pantheists who can see only beauty and gentility in nature should visit a tropical or sub-tropical forest. Grossness and strife are the key-notes, and the predominant motif is death and the fear of death. Much has been written of the gentle beauties of the English countryside, but where are the poets of the jungle?

The train stopped to pick up a red-haired Irishman, who told me that he had been sitting up all night for a tiger, but without success. He also related the providential escape of a friend from an infuriated leopard. The would-be leopard killer fired one barrel of his gun—he was using a double-barrelled shot-gun firing soft-nosed bullets—and missed. The other cartridge misfired. The next moment the leopard was on him. He ducked as it sprang and somehow—he was a powerful man—threw the beast over his shoulder. The leopard was so surprised at this “all in” treatment that it made off, leaving the hunter with a badly mauled arm which he subsequently lost through sepsis. The story ended romantically; he married his nurse.

Presently we emerged from the forest on to a hillside terraced with paddy fields. Even this foothill country is comparable with the Alps in scale. In one glance my eye passed from the steamy depths of valleys, little more than one thousand feet above the sea, to hills ten or twelve

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thousand feet high, and from these hills, to the distant snows of the Himalayas which were already half obscured by clouds rising in slow columnar masses from the ranks of blue foothills. I remembered Ruskin's majestic peroration :

" Out from between the cloudy pillars as they pass emerge for ever the great battlements of the memorable and perpetual hills."

Tom Brocklebank met me at the station and we walked up the steep streets of Darjeeling to the Planters Club, where I was most hospitably welcomed by the secretary and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Wrangham Hardy. From the "quarter-deck," as the terrace outside the club is known, the visitor, seated in an easy chair with a drink by his side, can look out over the roofs of Darjeeling on one of the grandest views in the world.

Ruttledge and the others had been working hard for the past fortnight, and most of the porters had been selected and "wormed" at the hospital, a necessary operation accomplished by means of castor oil and santonin. Ruttledge's plan was for the expedition to move slowly across Tibet and establish the Base Camp on or about April 20th, as he thought that this would help the party to acclimatise to altitude. To assist further in this process, an advance party in the charge of Ferdie Crawford, consisting for the most part of those without high-altitude experience, would leave in advance of the main party and remain for a few days at Tsomgo bungalow, 12,000 feet, on the Sikkim side of the Natu La, a pass of 14,300 feet, by which we were crossing the Himalayas into Tibet.

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The weather was already causing some anxiety as Dr. Sen, the Meteorologist of Alipore, who was supplying weather reports to the Expedition, had predicted an early monsoon. We knew that this was only a shrewd guess, based on a combination of different circumstances, but we knew too that so experienced a meteorologist would not hazard a guess without considerable data and forethought. It was worrying to our peace of mind, especially as the weather was unsettled along the Himalayas whilst the snow line was said to be abnormally low for the time of the year. Everything depended on our having a spell of fine, windless weather between the ending of winter conditions and the onset of the monsoon. In the absence of any such period we were doomed to almost certain failure.

The anxieties and responsibilities of the leader of an Everest expedition are many, yet, however carefully preparations may be made, success or failure in the end depends on a turn of Fortune's wheel. This is as well, otherwise mountaineering would be a dreary business.

Among our porters was Nima Tendrup, the "old soldier," who had been my servant on the Kangchenjunga and Kamet expeditions and had accompanied all three of the previous Everest expeditions. Only younger men were being chosen for our porter brigade, for "old soldiers" have a knack of grousing and imparting discontent to their fellows, whilst some of the men of past expeditions were still a prey to the superstitions woven about Everest, but in Nima Tendrup's case an exception was made. He was old as Bhotia porters go, probably over forty, though

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he gave his age as twenty-four, and would not be able to go very high, probably not above Camp 3, but he would do his best, that I could vouch for, and as a servant he would serve me well. Many of my Himalayan memories are inseparable from his solemn face with its permanently worried expression and its sudden broad smile.

Lewa was another veteran. He, also, had accompanied all the previous Everest expeditions, and had taken part in three Kangchenjunga expeditions. He had been sirdar of the Kamet expedition, and now he was to be head sirdar of an Everest expedition, a position coveted by all Himalayan porters. On Kamet he had lost all his toes through frost-bite, but to a man of his calibre this mattered little. No stronger, more hard-bitten man ever trod a mountainside. When, high on Kamet, one of the porters dropped his load through sheer exhaustion, Lewa picked it up and carried it *in addition to his own*, a total weight of over one hundred pounds, to the highest camp at 23,300 feet.

One more veteran was Lhakpa Chedi, who carried a load to Camp 6, 26,800 feet, on Everest in 1924. He had a comfortable billet as a waiter in Darjeeling, but was anxious to come as our mess-man and made no secret of his intention to go as high as anyone. And lastly, I cannot omit Ondi.¹ When I first saw Ondi in 1930 on Kangchenjunga, I thought I had never seen such a "tough," but I came to learn that beneath an almost blackguardly exterior, there reposed an

¹ Wangdi of "Everest 1933." I retain the spelling used in "The Kangchenjunga Adventure" and "Kamet Conquered."

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unshakable loyalty and a heart of gold. During that expedition he had fallen thirty feet into a crevasse and it was only by chance that I found him. He was badly knocked about and was sent down to the Base Camp and told to remain there by the doctor. This was not good enough; within three days he was up again, thirsting for further work.

The enthusiasm of the Sherpas and Bhotias for an Everest expedition is amazing. When word comes that an expedition is in being, they flock to Darjeeling from the remote villages of the Sola Khumbu valley in Nepal, or cross the high passes between Tibet and India. Accustomed as they are to poverty and hardship, and to the carrying of immense loads, there is much more than the desire for lucre, good boots and warm clothing, in their anxiety to accompany an expedition; they are adventurers; it is a point of honour with them to see Everest climbed.

Certainly an Everest porter's pay is better than that of a tea plantation coolie, whilst the possibility of a substantial bonus should he be selected to establish a high camp is a powerful incentive, yet, a sudden accession of wealth serves only to bring out his happy-go-lucky nature, and he will gamble away a month's pay in an hour or spend it almost as quickly on a single colossal "blind." In these days of life insurances and "safety first" there is something refreshing in the spirit of these men. Their attitude to their employers is best summed up by the remark of one of them to Ruttledge. "We will carry as high as we can. It is up to the Sahibs to finish the job." Many of us hope that

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one day one of these men will be given the opportunity of standing beside his employers on the summit of Mount Everest. It would be a fitting climax to the "job."

The days at Darjeeling passed pleasantly and quickly. Shebbeare, our chief transport officer, made arrangements with a Kalimpong mule contractor who agreed to convey our stores to Kampa Dzong in Tibet. Thenceforward we should be dependent on yaks and donkeys hired to us by the Dzongpens (Governors) of the districts through which we passed.

The expedition was provided with wireless, which was to be used to receive weather reports and transmit news to the press. There was a permanent station at Darjeeling under the charge of Mr. D. S. Richards, who had undertaken independently to organise this service, whilst two officers of the Royal Corps of Signals, Thompson and Smijth-Windham, were to accompany us to the Base Camp, whence it was hoped they would get into touch with Darjeeling, and be useful on Everest installing a telephone line between Camp 3 and the North Col.

Preparations were at last completed, but before the expedition left Darjeeling it was blessed by the Abbot of the local Buddhist monastery. It was a striking and picturesque ceremony held in bright sunlight with the shining snows of Kangchenjunga in the background. Each member was given a few grains of rice and a ceremonial scarf was placed around his neck. After an incantation the rice was tossed into the air as an offering to the gods. Finally, the Abbot blessed us and prayed

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for our success and safe return. The ceremony meant much to our porters and sent them off with brave hearts.

The advance party left Darjeeling on March 3rd. Crawford had acquired an immense, brilliantly striped umbrella, which almost concealed the "baby" Austin car in which he and some of his companions were to travel the first few miles. Amid ringing cheers from the assembled populace the umbrella and the "baby" Austin disappeared from view round a corner of the road.

The weather was bad along the Himalayas when they left and Kangchenjunga was plastered with freshly fallen snow. To appreciate fully the majesty and beauty of this marvellous mountain, visitors to Darjeeling should get up early and visit Observatory Hill, only a few minutes' walk from the centre of the town. From this vantage point, there is nothing to obscure the view of the snows fifty miles away in the north. The eye bridges at one bound the sub-tropical depths of the Rangit Valley, then passes over wave upon wave of foot-hill ranges, until brought up against the enormous barrier of the Himalayas.

On numerous occasions in the past I had stood on Observatory Hill and watched dawn or sunset on the crest of Kangchenjunga. So one morning a day or two before leaving Darjeeling I rose early and walked to the top of the hill. It was an absolutely still morning, but presently a light wind stirred a little grove of prayer flags arranged about a Buddhist shrine on the crest of the hill. It was a signal. In another instant Kangchenjunga was fired by the sun. For a few moments the light

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lingered there as though uncertain of its tenure, then swept downwards in a strengthening tide. One by one lesser peaks took up the tale, till a vast glowing curtain was hung in the dusky northern sky. So remote were these great mountains that it seemed strange to reflect that in a few weeks we should be among them. Then they would no longer be a spectacle to watch in warmth and comfort; we should feel their winds and their cold; and know the harsh strength of them and their brutality.

CHAPTER II

THE MARCH THROUGH SIKKIM

THE SECOND PARTY, OF WHICH I WAS A MEMBER, left Darjeeling for Kalimpong on March 8th. A fleet of "baby" Austin motor cars and Shebbeare's lorry conveyed us some miles along the road towards the Teesta valley. Baby cars have done much to alleviate the loneliness of the tea planters in the Darjeeling district, and narrow, tortuous mule tracks of terrifying gradients, once deemed impassable to cars, are now traversed as a matter of course.

I was a passenger in Shebbeare's lorry and at first was tempted to shut my eyes and offer up fervent prayers as it whirled round corner after corner of a narrow and winding road with the edges of precipitous hillsides never far from the wheels. But I did Shebby an injustice; he was accustomed to hill roads and well acclimatised to the giddiest drops off hairpin bends.

At the village of Ghum we picked up three Gurkhas who had been attached to the expedition: Havildar-Major Gaggan Singh Pun, Havildar Lachman Singh Sahi and Naik Bahadur Gurung.

The first and last named were typical of their race: small agile little men, packed with muscle,

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vim and energy. Shy and nervous at first, they soon became their natural selves, and there was always a grin handy on their broad faces. To such men hard physical work is a genuine pleasure, and if there is a spice of excitement or danger about it, so much the better. As with the Sherpa or Bhotia porter, life to the Gurkha is best worth while when it is adventurous.

Lachman Singh was, in appearance, a different type from his comrades. He was taller and slighter, and at first seemed to possess more of the characteristics of the plainsman than the hillman. There was thoughtfulness and breeding in his dark, lean face and large lustrous brown eyes; he was a good linguist and capable of assisting in the complicated monetary accounts of the Expedition.

The road, after passing through Ghum, crossed forest-clad hillsides. It was a cool morning on the heights and a damp mist mingled with the trees, but as we descended, coolness gradually gave place to warmth and we emerged from the mist into a torrid sun.

Beyond the eighth milestone from Darjeeling, the road was impassable even for Austin Sevens. Some of our porters were waiting for us there, among them Tsin Nurbu, who had been engaged to carry my photographic apparatus. I remembered him well as he was Kurz's servant during the 1930 Kangchenjunga Expedition, and had climbed the Jonsong Peak, 24,344 feet.

Weeks of physical inactivity had softened my feet and a combination of rough hill track and new marching boots soon brought about blisters; my own fault, as it is one of the minor follies of

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life to set out on a long march in brand-new boots. Marching in the Himalayas provides the mountaineer with excellent opportunities for using up the retired climbing boots that clutter up the attic at home.

The path descended steeply and the heat in the Teesta valley seemed almost to leap up at us as we lost height. The hillsides were covered with tea plantations whose sombre green contrasted pleasantly with a shimmering mica-laden dust lying inches deep on the sun-scorched path.

We were not sorry to stop for a drink at Mr. Lister's tea estate. On the verandah wall of his bungalow he had inscribed the heights of members of previous Everest expeditions. Up to date, Brigadier Norton had overtopped everyone, but he was now eclipsed by Raymond Greene. Regretfully we tore ourselves away from this pleasant place with its cool shady verandah and garden of colourful flowers.

Down and down the dusty path we tramped, and presently entered the jungle. If the sun was powerful on the open hillsides, the heat here was far more trying. The great trees with their moss-clad boles, the snake-like creepers and the dense undergrowth imprisoned a dank air, heavy with the fusty smell of rotting vegetation, which seemed almost to quiver with the whirring of insects and the insane clatter of frogs from every marshy place.

We passed through a filthy village, which might have been the capital of Beelzebub to judge from the hordes of pestering flies, to the suspension bridge spanning the Teesta river. The Teesta

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valley at this point is only 600 feet above sea-level, but gusts of cool air from the hurrying torrent reminded us of the far distant snows.

To our relief motor cars were waiting to convey us to Kalimpong. A well-engineered road climbs a steep hillside to this village, but it merely served to emphasise the mechanical incompetence of our native drivers. The native can acquire road sense, but mechanical sense, never. As with a certain type of European driver, it is a point of honour (and laziness) with him to climb everything he can on top gear, and he changes down only when the car is in danger of stopping altogether, and the engine is straining and groaning like a damned soul.

A most hospitable welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Odling awaited us at Kalimpong, and soon we were comfortably installed in a bungalow which had been reserved for our use.

The doyen of Kalimpong is Dr. Graham, the founder of the world-renowned Kalimpong Homes, where half-breed children, many of them the illegitimate children of tea planters by Nepali women, are educated, taught various handicrafts and in general fitted to earn their living. In the extensive workshops all manner of useful things are made, from clothing and furniture to metal-ware and objects of art.

It was a calm, delightfully cool night, and I slept on the verandah in my sleeping-bag. Nima Tendrup brought me a cup of tea early next morning and the sight of his broad smiling face somehow made me feel that the expedition had begun.

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There was plenty to be done at Kalimpong, including much unpacking and sorting of equipment, in which work the transport officers were considerably harassed by the weird and wonderful system governing the identification of our stores. Various bands of colours had been painted on the boxes on the supposition that the contents could be instantly identified by comparison with the store book. In theory this was perfect, but in practice the colours quickly wore off or by merging into one another produced new and unidentifiable colours, and it later transpired that one of the transport officers was colour blind. A further difficulty arose from haphazard packing. Thus, a case containing, say, one dozen bottles of champagne, half a dozen pairs of snow goggles and three pairs of socks was not calculated to simplify the troubles of our long-suffering transport officers.

Ponies for the march were supplied to everyone, mine being purchased from Raja Dorje, a Kalimpong dignitary who represents the Bhutan Government in India. She was a high-spirited little beast named Relling and not even the brand-new saddlery, which Raja Dorje had generously included in the purchase price, allayed certain qualms I had at the thoughts of narrow mountain paths with precipitous drops below them.

On March 12th we rose early. The mules were ready for their loads, but, as usually happens on these occasions, there were more loads than mules and additional animals had to be requisitioned. Before starting on the march we attended a service at the Mission Church which was conducted by Dr. Graham. Faithful to past habits I arrived

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late. Outside the church I had considerable difficulty with Relling, who bolted in a bee-line for the open porch, so that, for a moment, I pictured myself making a dramatic entry and clattering down the aisle. Relling knew as well as I that her new master was no horseman. I quieted her at last, and slunk in at the beginning of the psalms.

Ruttledge read the first lesson and Shebbeare the second; it was impressive to hear them clattering up the slippery aisle in their nailed boots. Then Dr. Graham delivered an address which he concluded by praying for our success and safe return.

After the service, Dr. Graham invited us to his house, a delightful place looking out over the forest-clad foothills. Then, with the cheers of the mission children and the "good lucks" of many friends in our ears, we set out on our long march to Everest.

It is about twelve miles from Kalimpong to Pedong. The route is one of the main trade routes between India and Tibet and along it, supported by roughly cut posts, runs a solitary telegraph wire, Lhasa's sole link with the outside world. The path is roughly cobbled over long stretches, and very fatiguing to walk upon, and it lies along the side of wooded foothills which gradually increase in height as the traveller progresses northwards.

The dak bungalow at Pedong is situated on an open slope looking over the valley of the Rangli Chu. Like most of the dak bungalows in Sikkim it commands an extensive and beautiful view, this being largely due to the foresight and unerring

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instinct for situation of a former political officer of Sikkim, Claude White.

There we were joined by George Wood-Johnson and Boustead; the former had come from his tea plantation near Darjeeling, the latter from the Sudan.

The night was chilly and more than once I was roused by the grumblings of George, who was attempting to sleep in one of the woollen bags officially supplied for the march. Although heavier than the eiderdown bags intended for use above the Base Camp, these were unsatisfactory. For warmth and comfort there is nothing to better a double eiderdown bag, and it was found necessary to scrap the woollen bags in their favour at an early stage of the expedition.

Most of us slept on the verandah and we woke in the cool dawn to hear the bell-like notes of the Himalayan cuckoo sounding from the forest.

From Pedong the path descended steeply to the Rangpo river, the boundary between Sikkim and British India, where our passes were examined by a smart and efficient-looking little Gurkha N.C.O. From the river a steep ascent through dense forest brought us hot and thirsty to the dak bungalow at Pakyong near a thriving bazaar where we purchased some oranges.

A little way from the bungalow is a grassy ridge commanding an uninterrupted view to the north and there Bill Birnie and I spent a lazy hour.

Some miles away across an intervening valley we could see the houses of Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, perched on a ridge, and more distantly the Himalayas, half drowned in a dense blue haze

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whence rose columns of copper-coloured thunderclouds. The haze deepened to an inky black as the afternoon lengthened and thunder grumbled over the ranges.

Nightfall quickly cleared the sky of thunderclouds and the moon rose over the Bhutan hills, lighting the wooded ridges and emphasising the profound shadows in the valleys between them.

The following morning was even more beautiful than the last. The atmosphere was limpid like a mountain-stream, the haze had vanished and in the north Kangchenjunga gleamed like an uncut jewel on a dark-blue cushion of foothills.

The march to Gangtok consisted once again of a long and steep descent followed by an equally long and steep ascent, where we were glad of our ponies. Relling was very suspicious of any unusual objects on or beside the path, but responded gallantly to "chu-chu," the equivalent of "gee-up" in this part of the world. Shebby, I noticed, walked the whole of the way. He was determined, indeed, to walk to the Base Camp, a Spartan effort of self-abnegation.

Half-way up the hillside, where we halted for lunch, Rutledge found a leech on the brim of my Terai hat. It was the only one of these pests we had so far encountered; we should see plenty of them during our return march in the rains.

Gangtok is ranged untidily on the side of a ridge, on the crest of which stands the Maharajah's palace, an unpretentious but attractive building constructed in the Chinese style, with a wide gently-sloping quadriform roof and elaborate porticoes. The same pippin-faced Chowkidar,

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whom I remembered in 1930, welcomed us at the dak bungalow and being well versed in the thirstiness of mountaineers quickly procured beer from the bazaar.

There was a certain amount of work to be done, including the fitting of flannel linings to our twenty-five high-altitude sleeping-bags, but I remember Gangtok best for its beautiful situation, its healthy climate and the hospitality we enjoyed there. The dinner Williamson, the Political Officer for Sikkim, gave us that night was our last in civilisation for some time and we made the most of it. It is sad to think that none of us can again enjoy his genial welcome; he died in 1935 while on a visit to Lhasa.

CHAPTER III

THE NATU LA

THREE DAYS PASSED QUICKLY AND ON MARCH 16TH we were off again. The porters realising, like us, the importance of making the best of civilisation, had a grand carousal in the bazaar the night before, and as we trudged uphill towards Karponang, I saw several with faces twisted in anguished headaches. Shebby and I kept together, both of us determined to walk the whole way to the bungalow. My feet were in better shape now, and I enjoyed walking, especially as we were nearing the high mountains.

The vegetation changed gradually as we ascended. Gangtok is just below the frost level and sub-tropical plants flourish, including orchids and tree ferns. Perhaps 1,500 feet higher the forest was snow-white with magnolias, and here and there we saw the delicate fronds of amaryllis swaying beside the path. Higher still, red rhododendrons were in bloom like splashes of blood amid the white magnolias.

We were soon reminded that we were following one of the principal trade routes into Tibet by meeting a convoy of mules and ponies laden with

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bales of wool; then an itinerant lama, dressed in dingy red, with a dry, puckered face which cracked into a smile when we greeted him.

The scene became Alpine, and long before reaching Karponang we passed drifts of oozing snow whilst the damp, steamy odours of the lower valleys were replaced by the resinous incense of the heights.

So stimulating was the air that we covered the ten miles from Gangtok and ascended 4,000 feet in just over four hours. We paid for our energy in thirst; on arrival I drank ten cups of tea and ate an enormous omelet prepared by Lhakpa Chedi, who was there well ahead of everyone.

The Karponang bungalow with its covered-in verandah reminded me of an Austrian mountain hotel. It was chilly at 9,500 feet and we were glad of warmer clothing. One of our first jobs was letting air into the petrol and paraffin tins to prevent leakage due to the difference of pressure at the increased altitude. Incidentally, I have yet to accompany a Himalayan expedition which did not lose one-quarter to one-third of its petrol or paraffin during the march.

That evening we sat around a blazing log fire, smoked our pipes and discussed plans for the future.

The following morning I left in advance of the others with a new cameraman. Tsin Nurbu had proved unsatisfactory and had been replaced at Gangtok by Tensing, a short, sturdy little fellow with almost bandy legs and a naïve disarming grin.

For some distance, the path traversed a hillside,

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then turned northwards. I rode Relling for about half a mile, but she was too frisky that morning, so much so that she put one foot over the edge of a log bridge. It was a nasty moment as there was a drop of about ten feet into a torrent. I walked for the rest of the day.

As we neared Tsomgo, it was apparent that Tibet was not far distant, for the valley in which the bungalow, 12,500 feet, is situated is as barren as the Grimsel Pass in Switzerland. In two days we had exchanged sub-tropical luxuriance for a stony, desolate waste. The snow had partially melted and lay in an ugly patchwork on the hill-sides, whilst a frozen lake, lowering clouds and an occasional drizzle of snow presented a dreary scene. We were not sorry to escape into the cosy little bungalow and toast ourselves before a log fire.

The first party had left two days before and, in a note to Hugh, Ferdie Crawford wrote that they had climbed Chomunko, a fine rock peak of 17,500 feet. There was some doubt at that time as to whether ascents during the march to Everest were beneficial, and I was one of those who believed in husbanding strength for the battle with high altitudes. My views have changed since. I believe now that acclimatisation should be gained, not on Everest where life is so wearing and uncomfortable, but on other mountains at an early stage of an expedition. It is only after several Himalayan expeditions that it is possible to formulate any logical opinions. It is easy to jump to conclusions, and a man on his first visit to the Himalayas is all too liable to do so. Climbing

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Everest is a science, and conclusions are only reached after numerous practical experiments.

Most of us were feeling the effects of altitude to some slight extent, for we had risen quickly from comparatively low valleys. My pulse-rate instead of its normal fifty or less had jumped to sixty, and I had the same feeling of tightness at my temples which I associate with the first climb or two of an Alpine holiday.

One of the porters developed severe toothache, and Raymond, deciding that the offending tooth would have to come out, extracted it with skill and dispatch. It was not the first time I had seen a native's tooth pulled out, and I have always marvelled at an apparent indifference to pain. In the present instance, there was not a murmur, and the toothless one walked happily away carrying his decayed property, anxious to exhibit it to his friends.

It was a cold evening and snowed a little, but at nightfall the mists cleared and stars appeared. Again we discussed ways and means on Everest. Two conclusions emerged: we must try to make Camp 1 virtually a base camp and possibly put an intermediate camp between Camps 4 and 5, for, as we all agreed, the long carry between these two camps was more likely than anything else to tire out the porters.

Owing to the altitude I slept badly that night. I shared a room with Hugh and the last thing he said to me was: "There's no one on this show I wouldn't like to see on the top."

We were off at 7.30 the next morning, March 18th. The sky was a deep blue, and the sun

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brilliant and warm; far below, in the direction of the Teesta valley, a sea of feathery clouds stretched southwards; it was altogether a morning to be up and doing and ideal for crossing the Natu La.

A long traverse across a hillside followed by a stiff ascent led to the pass. Enthusiasm for photography brought me there ahead of my companions. The shaley slopes were fatiguing, but it was stimulating to see a little forest of prayer flags, silhouetted against the deep blue sky, fluttering in the westerly breeze. It was the threshold of a new land.

Presently I stood beside the prayer flags and with their stiff, dry rustling in my ears gazed northwards into Tibet. The first thing I saw was Chomo Lhari, the sacred mountain of Eastern Tibet, rising from lower hills that faded from gold and brown in the foreground to a delicate blue in the far distance. A thin pennant-like cloud trailed from the summit and beyond it were other clouds, masses of slow-moving vapour, reflecting perceptibly the colour of the brown hills beneath. Distance and space were my first impressions of Tibet. We had climbed out of valleys clothed in luxuriant vegetation and here before us was a land utterly different, and profoundly peaceful.

Down we went, for some distance over slopes of soft snow. It was heavy work for the mules and some of them capsized, including the one carrying my bedding and other personal belongings. Half an hour later the snow was behind and we halted for lunch by a limpid stream decorated along the banks with prayer flags, placed there to propitiate

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the water gods. It was a depressing spectacle to watch our transport slowly filing past. These hordes of animals and hundreds of packing cases separated us from the simplicity of travel. I remembered a vow that one day I would travel in the Himalayas with the lightest and simplest of equipment; that I would be tied to no stages and committed to no plan; that I would wander where I chose. Somehow, this vast transport made Everest into an inexorable and rather dull duty. The companionship of the camp fire was absent and in its place was a rowdy mess tent, which always reminded me of a Sunday-school treat. We had carried civilisation into the wilds, and civilisation is better left at home.

And what of ourselves? "Team spirit" is an ineffective link when a large number of men, some of whom have not even seen one another before, are gathered together from the corners of the Earth and sent off to climb Everest. I can visualise a small party of friends. There is no need to rant and rhapsodise to them on the merits of "team spirit," because friends do not need to be reminded of it any more than a true patriot needs to be reminded of his country's flag. They are friends, and therefore have that give and take between them which is instinctive. That is the ideal mountaineering party. It is when people start to talk about "team spirit," thus implying something to be inculcated and remembered rather than something instinctive, that something seems wrong with this Everest business.

From our luncheon place a rough path descended to the Chumbitang bungalow. On the

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way I developed a splitting headache. It was a typical altitude head, aggravated by sun-glare, and every step on the stony track sent a jarring shiver of pain from the base of my neck to a point immediately above the eyes.

The bungalow is situated at 13,300 feet in a pine forest and must be one of the highest in the Himalayas. It was a cold evening with a hard frost, but once again we made ourselves cosy round a log fire. Shortly before turning in, Bill and Hugo Boustead discovered that the ponies' blankets were missing, the grooms having appropriated them for their own use. The miscreants were reprimanded, but thinking themselves safe, again purloined the blankets, but they reckoned without Bill, who repeated his visit of inspection. A "try out" such as this usually occurs during the early stages of a Himalayan expedition. The native, with his simple cunning, tries to get the better of his sahib. If the sahib is weak, so much the better, but if he is intolerant of "old soldierly" tactics, well, the "old soldier" must resign himself to the fact. Obviously, unless prompt and stern measures are taken to deal with offenders matters quickly go from bad to worse. Hugh's first action the following morning was to dismiss the head groom and one of his assistants. Another groom when asked by "Shebby" why he had not covered his pony with a blanket ingeniously replied that he was trying to harden off the pony to the Tibetan climate.

During the descent into the Chumbi valley, which is one of the few fertile and wooded valleys in this part of Tibet, I saw a bullfinch, some

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eidelweiss and several picas, quaint little rat-like animals, something like marmots.

On the way we turned aside to visit the Khajuk Monastery, which stands on a bluff overlooking the Chumbi valley. Passing through a gateway and not forgetting to give some large cylindrical prayer wheels packed with tens of thousands of prayers a turn, we entered a courtyard decorated in red and yellow, the sacred colours of Tibet. There we were received by the abbot and were shown over the monastery. The temples and shrines were very dark and lit only by a few wicks floating in little bowls of butter. There were numerous images in niches, some of them beautifully carved, and one, a pale-faced, white-clad female figure, was said to represent the goddess of Everest; the porters lost no time in adorning it with propitiatory scarves. The abbot had himself executed some of the mural paintings. These represented various aspects of human life, and were of a frankness calculated to shock the more reticent Westerner. There were also numerous phallic symbols, emblems of mortal and earthly fertility. The monastery was pervaded by the smell of incense, butter and unwashed clothing.

The monks were very curious and some of them incessantly demanded baksheesh. They wanted to know why we were trying to climb Mount Everest and I think suspected some material object, possibly a search for gold, even after Hugh had done his best to explain through Karma Paul our disinterested and idealistic motives.

A good path over a fir-clad hillside brought us to the floor of the Chumbi valley. There we met

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Russell, the British trade agent, and a party of Tibetan dignitaries, all wearing dark glasses, who had come from Lhasa; one of them was the Dalai Lama's representative.

Just before reaching the bungalow at Yatung, we came upon an old man with a terribly lacerated back lying on a blanket by the wayside. He had been mercilessly beaten, and we learned that he was a suspected murderer and had received 150 lashes as an inducement to confess. The villagers made no attempt to help him, but stood around grinning broadly. He was starving as well, and we sent him some food and did our best to find someone to care for him. This made us realise, more than anything, that we were no longer in British administered territory, but in a country where prevails an age-long custom and summary justice.

Rain fell heavily shortly after our arrival at the bungalow. Smijth-Windham and Thompson with their wireless banderbast arrived a little later, having taken a different route over the Jelap La. They brought with them a case of whisky which was welcomed with acclamation. That evening the expedition gramophone was worked hard and I finished writing my diary to the strains of the latest rumba, a strangely incongruous noise in the solitudes of Tibet.

CHAPTER IV

TO KAMPA DZONG

THE RAIN CEASED IN THE NIGHT AND THE SUN SHONE brilliantly next morning, March 20th. The dark-green firs mantling the hillsides and the craggy mountain tops, set in a brilliantly blue sky, reminded me of the Tyrol, for the Chumbi valley, unlike most of Tibet, is fertile owing to its southerly situation and its accessibility to the monsoon air current as well as to the rain and snow precipitated by the range of Pauhunri in the west.

After breakfast some Tibetans insisted on dancing outside the bungalow, obviously for bak-sheesh, but it was a poor performance and their scratch band had none of the resonance or rhythm of a properly constituted monastery band.

A small detachment of Indian infantry is stationed at Yatung to protect the trade route which, since Sir Francis Younghusband's Expedition of 1904, has been held by the Indian Government as far as Gyantse, and the Sepoys amuse themselves with football and hockey on their parade ground, a flat space liberally sprinkled with stones. As soon as George saw this he proposed a game of polo. Equipment was soon forthcoming in the shape of hockey sticks, lent by the

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soldiers, and two polo sticks which George had cherished all the way from Kalimpong. Raymond and I being no horsemen, much less polo players, were content to watch, applaud and, if necessary, jeer.

It was a desperate affair, that game, and it was not long before Hugo came a nasty cropper, after being horribly fouled by George. Bill, however, was in his element, as he is an expert, and his skill in appropriating the ball probably went far towards saving others cracked skulls. For the rest it seemed that limbs must be broken sooner or later, but as often happens in such rough and tumbles, the game ended with nothing worse than bruises.

March 20th was a lazy day. The sun shone cheerfully and was pleasantly warm. That evening some of us dined with Russell, and the English doctor of the Chumbi valley. Russell had made himself very comfortable in his office bungalow, and we envied him his pleasant retreat, so cut off from the outside world. We were thinking of bed when news came that some of our transport, which had been behind us, had passed through Yatung without stopping, apparently unaware of our arrival. It was necessary to prevent it getting too far ahead, especially as we needed some of the Whymper tents, so Bill bravely left at 10.30 on his pony in an attempt to stop it.

Next morning, March 21st, we set off to Gautsa where the first party were awaiting our arrival.

There are numerous hamlets and villages in the Chumbi valley. All seemed prosperous and some, with their wide chalet-like roofs weighted with

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stones, reminded me of Alpine villages. The people were friendly and grinned and salaamed as we passed; no doubt they make an easier living than the people in the less fertile districts to the north.

The valley climbed steeply and presently we emerged from the forest on to open slopes where, in a sheltered nook away from a chill wind, some of us lunched and afterwards cantered over two miles of perfect turf.

The fine day was short-lived; clouds crowded up from the west and snow fell. As we neared the bungalow the second party gathered outside it and a dismal dirge-like song came to us through the snow. It seemed dimly familiar, then I remembered. I had heard it once before, during the general strike, sung by a motley collection of people in the street outside the T.U.C. Headquarters; it was the "Red Flag."

To divide an expedition up into two parties inevitably tends to produce cliques, and I suspect that members of both parties secretly wished in their hearts that things could have continued as they were. However, this feeling presently disappeared, and we became one party again which, if too large for the liking of some of us, was at least as homogeneous as could be expected when a number of persons previously unacquainted with one another are brought together and directed towards a common objective.

Bill, in spite of his night ride, had been unable to retrieve the Whympers tents and we had to make shift with the bungalow, which was too small for the whole party, and the mess tent. Owing to the

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limited accommodation of the former we dined on the verandah. It was snowing hard and for the first time I was glad of my thick llama wool coat. Afterwards we crowded into the little living-room, and Ferdie Crawford, possibly inspired by the "Red Flag," discoursed at length on Russia and Bolshevism. The four relegated to the mess tent, of whom I was one, slept well but were awakened by a yell from Jack Longland when a chair fell on him in the night.

We remained at Gautsa during the whole of the following day. Hugh summoned the expedition together, and told us that he had made Shebby, the senior transport officer, second in command of the expedition.

Towards midday more bad weather blew up from the west, and snow fell heavily all the afternoon and evening. Next morning, March 23rd, it lay several inches deep, but the sky had cleared and the sun shone powerfully as we breakfasted.

Fortunately, not enough snow had fallen to impede our transport animals. The valley, at first sparsely wooded, became barer and bleaker in its upper reaches, and barren hillsides swept up on either hand.

The ease with which I walked uphill at a height little less than the summit of Mont Blanc proved that I was acclimatising well. Presently, to save energy, I rode, but soon had an unpleasant experience. The path in one place was only a foot or two wide owing to drifted snow, and below were slopes and crags falling sheer to a river. Suddenly a small piece of snow dislodged by the sun rolled on it. This so startled Relling that she reared up

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on her hind legs and balanced for a moment on the very edge of the cliff, then bolted along the narrow path. I struggled to get my nailed boots out of the stirrups, but they had jammed. Eventually I managed to wrench her head towards the mountainside, and she plunged into a snow drift and stopped, quivering with fear.

Presently we emerged from the valley on to a wide plain bounded by low hills. There for the first time we experienced the full force of the Tibetan wind, a withering blast that made us pull on thick gloves and balaclava helmets.

The route lay through snow drifts, slush and boggy ground. Sometimes at a bridge over a stream, there was an awkward jam of struggling mules, and woe betide anyone whose pony was caught in the maelstrom. Karma Paul accidentally got involved on one occasion. He was forced off his pony by the press and only the prompt action of a porter prevented him from being trampled under foot.

We were now on the Phari plain and could see Phari Dzong, a full five miles distant, but appearing much nearer in the brilliant atmosphere. Here was Tibet proper, and a bleak, inhospitable land it seemed, brown and desolate, unmoving and unchanging, except for the slow march of sun and cloud in the steadfast blue of the moistureless sky. Scarcely a blade of grass was to be seen, nothing but earth, sand and stones. Yet life was not altogether at a discount. There were birds, and popping in and out of their burrows scores of little picas.

As we neared Phari, we saw its Dzong (fort)

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towering above a huddle of mean houses built of earth, mud and stones. This village has an evil reputation for health, and former Everest expeditions have contracted dysentery there. It is curious how human beings maintain their filth and diseases in a situation so open to the winds of heaven.

A redeeming feature of Phari is the view of Chomo Lhari. We had seen this mountain from the Natu La; now we had a closer and more impressive view. It reminded me of Kamet and should prove climbable by its long eastern slope. The wind-driven snow was tearing from the crest in a great white plume, and I think the sight of this was the first intimation some of us had as to what we must expect on Everest. It was a sobering thought that this wind-swept summit was little higher than the North Col, our jumping-off point for the final ascent.

The inhabitants of Phari welcomed us noisily. Among them was the village madman, who proceeded to strip himself of his clothing, a feat which it is certain no sane person would care to emulate in the Tibetan climate.

Tents were pitched for the first time. Each of us had one to himself of the Whymper pattern, large enough to stand up in and with plenty of spare room for suitcases and kitbag. A certain amount of privacy is psychologically necessary during an expedition; privacy, to write, read and think. For the first time since leaving Darjeeling, I was able to unpack my personal belongings, such as photographs, books and letters.

Russell arrived the same day. He was *en route*

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to Gyantse and dined with us in the mess tent.

Phari is not an ideal introduction to Tibet; in one matter only do I connect it with pleasure—sleeping for the first time in my own tent. Here was a space I could call my own, something to escape to at times from the crowded mess tent.

Owing to transport difficulties we had to spend two nights there. There was one exciting incident when Ferdie's servant managed to set his master's sleeping-bag alight through carelessness with a candle. This in turn set alight to the tent, and only the early discovery of the accident saved a more serious conflagration as a strong wind might easily have driven the flames through the camp. I have often pictured the appalling consequences if some evil-disposed person were to set a light to the store dump of an Everest expedition.

Hugh spent much time composing a dispatch to the newspapers. This onerous work is one of the many penalties of leadership of a large expedition. I speak from experience, as I have written the dispatches of two expeditions. Having to concentrate on a dispatch after a hard day's marching or climbing is a fatiguing job and not one that should fall on the leader of an Everest expedition, who is over-burdened with other responsibilities. One of the best things about travel in remote regions is that the traveller is cut off from the outside world. Such "splendid isolation" is not possible when an expedition is equipped with wireless and has by this or some other means to maintain touch with the press. A craving for isolation may sound selfish to those who like to follow an expedition in the spirit through the

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medium of print, but the true lover of travel hates anything extraneous to the job in hand.

Old Nima Tendrup was now in his element. He was never an efficient servant during the bungalow marches, but in camp life he excelled. In 1930, he had very soon discovered that if his hair and mine were not to be prematurely whitened, some method must be evolved out of my natural untidiness. Everything, therefore, my clothes, and odds and ends, had to be packed methodically. This required considerable perseverance on his part, for I was wont to turn out my suitcase and scatter its contents broadcast on the floor of my tent. Yet, so strict was the discipline he enforced, I soon found myself automatically putting things in their right place, and I even, after a while, began to remember where they were. The net result was less trouble for Nima Tendrup, and it was no longer necessary for me to rout him out to find something. He always had an eye to the main chance, and the main chance with him was the avoidance of unnecessary work. He would have made a captain of industry had he been born to that station of life.

Phari being interpreted means "Hog Hill," and the filth and smells of this village make it a singularly appropriate name, but during the two nights we spent there we were tempted to substitute Dog, for the number of these animals rivalled the number of inhabitants and they barked and yowled incessantly the greater part of the night. One reason for the unhealthfulness of Phari was soon apparent—the dust. The dry climate pulverises offal and filth of all kinds, and the prevailing

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north-west wind does the rest. During our two days there our tents, clothing and food were never free from this dust, and it was as well when eating a meal not to allow the imagination to dwell on its origin. There are two golden rules of travel in Tibet: firstly, boil all water and, secondly, camp to the windward of villages.

We left Phari thankfully on March 25th. There had been 22° of frost in the night, and I had been kept awake till 2 a.m. by barking dogs. With a short march before us we did not leave until after lunch. Raymond and I rode together the first three miles, then dismounted and walked as the wind was cold and snow beginning to fall. There were no syces (grooms) in view, but Nima Dorje, one of the assistant cooks, and a porter, appeared, and we handed over our ponies to them. Disobeying orders, the porter tried to mount Relling, but he was so clumsy that he fell off backwards, jamming one foot in a stirrup, and Relling bolted, dragging the unfortunate man violently along the rocky ground. We tried to get hold of the bridle, but Relling was thoroughly frightened. Luckily for the porter his foot came away from the stirrup. For a few moments he lay there, and we thought he had broken a bone; then he grinned broadly and scrambled to his feet. As for Nima Dorje, he appeared to consider the incident a huge joke and roared with laughter.

Monotonous slopes led up the Tang La, 15,200 feet. The wind smote us vigorously and powdery snow mingled with dust swept stingingly into our faces. It was a dull pass, indeed scarcely a pass at all except in name. Its sole merit is its proximity

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to Chomo Lhari, and as we descended the far side to the camping place known as Shabra Shubra, the snow-laden mists thinned and we saw the great peak's brown-grey precipices; they might have been fashioned by a few careless slashes of a Titan's knife.

Shabra Shubra was a horribly uncomfortable camping place. The wind raged out of the west across the desert-like plain and it was all the porters could do to pitch the tents; the big mess tent in particular needed a dozen men to tame it. We had walked over the Tang La easily enough and most of us seemed to be acclimatising well, but we soon discovered that breath was easily lost when the body was called upon to wrestle with a large tent in a strong wind.

The conditions were bad enough to daunt any cook, but Tencheddar rose nobly to the occasion and produced a superb Irish stew. With this and some hot tea inside us we snuggled into our sleeping-bags.

At sunset the wind slackened somewhat and I ventured outside my tent to take some photographs. The scene was indescribably bleak and magnificent. From the camp, the brown wind-bleached plain stretched for miles to the north and west, streaked and patched with snow and blurred here and there with hurrying squalls. Immediately to the east rose the precipices of Chomo Lhari with ragged wisps of cloud twisting slowly up them, whilst on the crest of the mountain a writhing sheet of wind-driven snow flamed in the setting sun.

So this was Tibet; incredible that men and

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women could dwell in such inhospitable surroundings; why had they not immigrated to the fertile valleys south of the Himalayas? Is there an instinctive love and reverence in their hearts for this brown wind-swept desert with its far blue hills and the southward glimmer of the Himalayan snows?

I took one or two photographs, fumbling with half-numbed fingers at my camera, then was glad to escape from the searing cold and burrow into my sleeping-bag where I presently became warm.

Probably the dirt and germs of Phari had something to do with it, but I had stomach pains that *night and did not sleep until the small hours*. The temperature fell to -4° F., and as I lay I could hear above the flurries of wind and snow the stamps and groans of the unfortunate mules and ponies. How they survive such nights in the open I do not know.

As the hours passed ice formed by my breath gathered on the mouth of my sleeping-bag, and dogs barked dismally from a neighbouring Tibetan encampment. Once I struck a match and glanced at my watch. I worked out that at home (allowing the difference between English and Indian time) my wife was just sitting down to her dinner, and here was I uncomfortable without and within, wondering whether sleep would ever come to hasten the passage of the leaden-footed hours.

The sun struck the camp late next morning owing to Chomo Lhari. There is one consolation about camping in cold weather: the traveller sleeps in his underclothes; thus the agonies of

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dressing are obviated. My boots were like granite and I tried ineffectually to thaw them, first over a candle, and then in the sun. Finally I rammed my feet into them as best I could and for the next few hours my toes were kept fully occupied in thawing them. What I disliked most about the march to the Base Camp was having to breakfast in the open every morning. This was accounted necessary owing to the absence of the mess tent, which had to be sent on in advance to the next camping place, but I suspect that the real reason was a Spartan desire on the part of our leader to harden us off.

It was a picturesque company that assembled for breakfast. Everyone was muffled up to the eyes, and Willy McLean in a huge green canvas wool-lined coat, which had been given to him by General Bruce, reminded me of the well-known advertisement for Michelin motor tyres.

The morning was calm when we sat down, but before we had finished eating the wind was beginning to blow again. According to Ferdie, it was three hours too early and should not have risen in this part of Tibet until ten o'clock. It was obvious that we were in for a hard day's marching, and the mess tent was got off well in advance on the backs of Phil and Flo, the two mules specially selected to carry it. So also were the wireless petrol engine and generator, the most awkward load of all, which was valiantly carried by four porters.

We all rode, but I for one spent the first hour or two waggling my toes to and fro in my boots. The wind increased, as we progressed westwards,

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and the powdery snow was hurled across the plain in stinging clouds and it was all our ponies could do to face the blast, whilst here and there the snow had collected in drifts several feet deep, and several times I had to dismount and lead the floundering Relling to solid ground.

There were ten miles of this travelling across what, according to Wager, was very like Greenland. Then we halted in the shelter of a bank where the ground began to rise, and ate some chocolate and biscuits. After this the route led gradually uphill to a pass where there was a cornice overhanging a short, steep snow slope. I found a gap in the former and tried to urge Relling through it and down the snow slope, but the snow was so soft that she went in up to the girths and becoming frightened plunged and reared; so I dismounted and dragged her down the slope, getting a kick on the shin for my pains.

Beyond this pass we came out of the snowy country into a stony, desolate valley, flanked by barren hillsides. On one occasion, it was necessary to cross the stream that flowed down the valley. I have reason to bless that stream. As the result of a motor accident four months before leaving England there was an adhesion in one of my knees that made certain movements painful and difficult, so much so that I wondered whether it would affect my climbing on Everest. Relling refused the stream, so I dismounted and, holding the bridle in one hand, jumped across. I landed awkwardly on a loose stone and fell, twisting my knee as I did so. The pain was intense, and for a minute or two I sat there unable to move, but

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when I rose to my feet I found that the knee was working more easily than before, and from that time onwards I was no longer troubled by it. The sudden twist must have broken down the adhesion.

The camping place known as Lunge Bur was less exposed to the wind than Shabra Shubra, but it was only after a struggle that we pitched the mess tent. It had been a terribly trying day for the porters and transport animals, and Shebby said that it was the hardest march he had ever done. This was our highest camp so far, about 16,000 feet, and exertion of any kind made us puff hard. Late in the afternoon I strolled up an old moraine above the camp, and finding a sheltered spot, basked in the sun. It was the first time I had been warm and comfortable in the open since leaving Phari, and it was pleasant to feel the heat of the sun while listening to the disappointed roaring of the wind on a crest only a few yards above me.

There was a cheerful company in the mess tent at supper, for we all felt that the worst was behind us. The night was warmer, but the altitude bothered me, and I slept badly. To the misery of sleeplessness was added an infernal yapping of dogs the whole night through.

We rose at six next morning, March 27th. The wind had fallen to a complete calm, and the warm sun made breakfasting in the open pleasant for once in a way. In spite of a bad night I felt fairly fit, and decided that a day's walking would help me to acclimatise. It was a long march for imperfectly acclimatised men, about 14 miles; and

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included three passes, the highest being nearly 18,000 feet, but I felt the altitude much less than I had expected and was able to enjoy the beautiful views. The atmosphere was crystal clear, and in the south the Himalayas rose in a great wall from the golden plains.

Most of the day I walked with Shebby, whose enthusiasm for nature and inexhaustible fund of good stories made him an interesting and entertaining companion. During the latter part of the march, I had a slight altitude headache and was glad to ride the last two miles on April the Fifth, a docile old pony who seemed as steady as a tank after the exuberant Relling. Subsequently at Bill's suggestion I took her over permanently whilst Bill, a splendid horseman, had Relling. From both points of view it was an eminently satisfactory exchange.

So far we had subsisted largely on fresh meat and vegetables, but so badly cooked was the dinner that night, possibly due to the altitude, that a difference of opinion already in evidence suddenly came to a head in a fierce argument as to which was preferable, badly cooked and indigestible fresh food, or more digestible tinned food. On this occasion I confined myself to chocolate biscuits and as a result slept well, but I was one of the few who did, for the combined effects of the dinner and a very cold night kept many awake. Raymond told me next morning that it was the coldest night he had known in the Himalayas. Only that tough old warrior Shebby seemed completely unaffected and he woke me before the sun had risen and it was still bitterly

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cold, as he wanted to know what exposure to give his 16 mm. cinema film.

We breakfasted off eggs purchased from a neighbouring village. They were about half the size of English eggs and their shells were so thin that they broke unless carefully handled. Some were of ancient lineage, but none were actually bad.

Miles of the pebbly plain over which we marched that day could have been covered by motor cars or used as a landing ground by aeroplanes. The weather was good and the Himalayas serene and unclouded. Among a host of great mountains Chomiomo and Kangchenjau were visible and later Kangchenjunga appeared.

In the north was a range of high brown, snow-capped hills. The highest had two huge scars in it, caused by landslips, which were so light in colour that they gleamed in the sun as though some fabulous hoard of silver had been laid bare.

We lunched out of the wind below some crumbling cliffs. Jack found them impossible to resist, and was soon disporting himself on some hair-raising "routes" whilst the rest of us basked in the sun.

Our camping place at Tatsang was beneath a crag crowned by a nunnery. The camp was on the leeseide of the crag, but the wind, not to be so easily outwitted, veered quickly round and resumed its attack with renewed vigour.

The difference between sun and air temperatures in Tibet must be experienced to be appreciated. In my tent it was positively hot, but outside the wind was bitingly cold. This wind in

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combination with the sun dries the face until it cracks like the parched mud of a river bed. The only way of preventing its depredations is to keep the skin moist and pliable with face cream, and I had nursed my own countenance with loving care, but even so, one corner of my lip was unpleasantly cracked. Others with a healthy disregard for cosmetics were in worse plight, and Tom Brocklebank's face had been reduced to a condition suggestive of a lunar landscape.

In the afternoon we climbed up a steep path to the nunnery where we were warmly welcomed by the nuns, who varied from mere children to old ladies so wizened that they seemed almost a part of the arid landscape. Their clothing was black with age and their smoke-darkened faces were almost concealed by immense mop-like wigs of greasy wool. By way of a jest, or perhaps for some religious motive, the body of a sheep had been nailed to the door of the nunnery. This instead of putrifying had merely dried and mummified in the dry air. The interior of the nunnery was dark and full of strange smells. Glass is seldom seen in Tibet, and light and ventilation are at a discount in Tibetan dwellings; no doubt after the relentless glare of the plateau, darkness comes as a relief. These nuns lead a life of almost unbelievable hardship. Their only fuel is shing (dried yak dung), and how sufficient crops to maintain them can be raised from the miserable soil of this district is a mystery. Probably some Tibetan Authority sees to it that supplies are sent. Prayer and contemplation are their principal occupations, and the view, at least,

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gives them scope for the latter, for the monastery commands a marvellous outlook over the brown plains to the Himalayas.

Almost the first thing that strikes the traveller in Tibet is the cheerfulness of the people. No hardship or discomfort could dim the smiles of the nuns as they posed for their photographs, and these smiles broadened, if that were possible, when we presented the nunnery with a gift of money, and they whipped off their woollen wigs and bowed low in gratitude.

It was not a pleasant evening. The wind hurled itself furiously at the camp, and clouds of dust enveloped everything—our clothes, our hair, our sleeping-bags, the food we ate, were covered with this abominable dust. Our porters, in a praiseworthy attempt to provide us with a change of diet, spent some time in snaring snow trout from a stream. They caught two or three, but they were small and bony and not worth eating. Such poaching was not favoured by the nuns, and we were told that destruction of these trout, which were evidently regarded as sacred, would bring us bad luck. This prophecy (?) was fulfilled when one of our mules died suddenly and mysteriously in the night. Medical opinion, however, did not put any magical interpretation upon this, and the diagnosis was distended stomach and colic due to drinking too much snow water.

The dry air of the Tibetan plateau and the constant dust had already produced a crop of sore throats, and nasal douches and throat sprays were much in demand. I was fortunate as yet, but my throat was too dry and uncomfortable for cigar-

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ette smoking. Though dust, particularly germ-infected dust, may by itself cause a congested throat, I am convinced that the intensely dry air of Tibet is mainly to blame. On Kamet, which is situated in a moister climate, none of us suffered, but on the north-west face of Kangchenjunga, which is exposed in part to the dry north-west wind of Tibet, there were numerous sore throats.

The temperature fell to zero during the night, but that devilish wind dropped and the following morning dawned calmly. To reach Kampa Dzong we had to cross a pass of 16,000 feet, at the head of a gently sloping valley about nine miles long. On the way to it we saw a gazelle and several kyang (wild asses). Waggars, who had already found much to interest him in the geology of the country, passed me at a gallop as I was walking April the Fifth up the stony track, but he had not gone far when his pony stumbled and he took a nasty toss from which he was lucky to escape with minor cuts and bruises. I did not see him pocket any of the angular quartzites (or whatever they were) on which he landed.

It was obvious when we reached the pass that if we climbed a hill to the south we should obtain an extensive view of the Himalayas, and in all probability see Everest in the west. Our anticipations were fulfilled when, after an easy ascent of about 1,000 feet over stony slopes and scree, a wonderful panorama greeted us, extending from some far-distant peaks in Bhutan to Mount Everest and the great massif to the north-west of it including Chö-oyu, and Gyachung Kang. Five of the ten highest mountains of the world were

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visible: Kangchenjunga 28,150 feet, Makalu 27,790 feet, Lhotse (the south peak of Everest) 27,890 feet, Everest 29,002 feet, and Chö-oyu 26,870 feet.

Everest nearly 100 miles away, beyond the Nyonna-ri range and the snows of Arma Dreme, was unclouded, and we could distinctly see a thin stream of wind-driven snow trailing from the crest. We gazed long at it, for there was our goal, the end of our pilgrimage. Could we attain it? On the hillside we had puffed hard, and our hearts were still beating fast, and there were 11,000 feet still to go. The head of a pin held at arm's length would almost have covered the mountain, yet through a telescope magnifying 40 diameters every major detail was visible: the sweep of the north ridge from the North Col leading up to the ragged crest of the north-east shoulder and the north-east ridge separating the north rock face from the ice-clad south-east face; the second step in the ridge, on the possibility of which so much depended, and the little triangle of snow on the final pyramid tapering upwards to the summit.

South-east of Everest rose the graceful pyramid of Makalu, and eastwards of this the eye swept over a hundred lofty summits to the square-topped Jonsong Peak, 24,344 feet. The ridge we had climbed in 1930 was clearly visible, and I could see the snowy shelf where we had pitched our highest camp. Then came the massif of Kangchenjunga. Three of its five peaks were visible, and through the telescope the ridge connecting the east peak with the summit could be seen in detail, a thin blade of ice hacked into jagged towers and

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moulded by the wind into sickle-like curves, whence great cornices curled over like waves breaking against the blue firmament.

Almost parallel with the skyline of the east ridge was the north-east spur climbed by two Bavarian expeditions. This could tell much of effort, courage and tragedy. Where the spur abutted against the north ridge, the avalanche-swept slope which finally stopped the second expedition was clearly visible.

Eastwards of Kangchenjunga, and just showing over Chomiomo, was Sinolchum¹ with its ice-fluted ridges uniting with mathematical precision in a summit of surpassing delicacy and beauty.

Next came Chomiomo, Kangchenjau and Pauhunri, three sonorous names for three noble mountains, which are linked for all time with the name of Dr. A. M. Kellas, who had died on the very pass beneath us during the 1921 Everest Expedition.

Chomo Lhari was nearly fifty miles away now, and beyond it peak after peak ranged far across Bhutan into the blue hazes of illimitable distance where snow-fields and peaks melted in mid-air like shimmering snowflakes.

To me, at least, it was very interesting to see again the two isolated summits I had seen in 1930 from the Jonsong Peak. Their bearing, ascertained with a prismatic compass, was 28° north of east. We were nearer to them than I had been on the Jonsong Peak, but only their summit snows were visible; and they were at least 150 miles

¹ This peak was climbed by a German party led by Paul Bauer in 1936.

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away. There is nothing in the map to suggest the presence of high mountains in this direction, and these two peaks must be over 20,000 feet high and may exceed 23,000 feet. It would be interesting to know whether any traveller has seen them, and can throw light on their position.

We ate lunch and I busied myself with photography, until a cold wind forced us to descend. On the way down we saw several hares; how they live in this wilderness it is difficult to say, yet there is vegetation of a sort, brown and withered at this time of the year, but renewing its growth later when the moist air and rains of the monsoon arrive. There were also some curious marks on the sandy slopes consisting of ribbon-like tracks only an inch or two wide running as regularly and as straight as ski-tracks down the hill. These puzzled us; were they the tracks of snakes?¹

We regained the pass in a few minutes and descended from it towards Kampa Dzong. It was pleasantly warm, indeed hot, in the valley, and for almost the first time in Tibet we discarded clothing on the march.

To judge from the herds of barhal grazing on the slopes above us, there would seem to be plenty of game in this district, but it is, of course, never shot, the taking of animal life being frowned upon by the Tibetans. Perhaps generations hence, when wild life has been exterminated in many parts of the globe, this will be appreciated.

We turned a corner, passed a primitive water-

¹ As far as I know no snakes have been seen in this part of Tibet. Have snakes ever been seen anywhere at such an altitude?

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mill and came within sight of Kampa Dzong. The fort stands on a rugged crag some 800 feet above the plain; a simple, beautiful citadel and designed by men with an instinct for architectural power and symmetry.

Camp was pitched on a level expanse of stubbly grass in the shelter of a low, sandy ridge, whence issued a spring of pure water, near a village of low, flat-roofed houses, ornamented at every corner with bunches of willow wands to ward off evil spirits.

An inferior curry at dinner that evening was followed unexpectedly by a magnificent stew for which, alas, most of us had no room—one of life's *minor tragedies*. After dinner Raymond, in response to many requests, told a long and amusing story of an acquaintance who is reputed to dabble in Black Magic. He is a born raconteur and from this point of view alone was an asset to the expedition. It was much warmer, and when we turned in at 8 p.m. the thermometer registered only 4° of frost.

Kampa Dzong is situated at about 12,000 feet, and I slept well. There were 14° of frost in the night, but the sun struck the camp early next morning. It was a lazy day for me, except for letter-writing and photography, but the transport officers had plenty to do in checking over the dump of stores which had arrived in advance of the expedition, whilst the "Bijli Wallahs"¹ busied themselves with the petrol generator and charged up their wireless batteries. The generator made little noise, merely a steady chug-chug, but

¹ Wireless officers: Smijth-Windham and Thompson.

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it was an irresistible "draw" to the inhabitants of the village, who spent hours gazing at it with ill-concealed awe.

Part of the day was spent in a long and involved settling-up of accounts with the Kalimpong mule contractor, whilst Jack and Wyn identified loads, a process much complicated by the system of colouring. As Bill said, loads should be numbered straight through. This was the method we adopted on Kamet and it proved simple and successful.

Late that afternoon Hugh, Shebby, Wyn and I, taking with us Karma Paul, called on the Deputy Dzongpen, the Dzongpen (Governor) being away on a visit to Lhasa. We were ushered into a dark, earthy-smelling house and seated ourselves on a low, carpet-covered bench in a little space which was half courtyard and half room. Hugh, who was clad in a long embroidered Tibetan coat and an English opera hat, obviously created a profound impression. After an exchange of compliments, presents were presented to our host, in return for a gift of six dozen eggs, consisting of a Homburg hat, a pair of expedition goggles, a looking-glass, a flask of whisky and the usual ceremonial scarf. For one awful moment we thought that the whisky was not whisky but tea, as earlier in the expedition some practical jokers had substituted this in one of the flasks, but it happily proved to be the genuine article. After a further exchange of courtesies, chang (native beer) was served in wide, shallow china cups. Before sipping it, a little finger tip must be dipped five times into the cup and a drop flicked into the

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air, as a gift to the gods. The guests then take a sip and some more chang is immediately added. This ceremony of sipping and refilling the cup is repeated twice, but after the third time the whole of the contents may be consumed. Then Hugh demonstrated the capabilities for contraction and expansion of his opera hat, to the huge delight of everyone. He also promised to write from England, and our host promised to answer. After being invited to visit the Dzong on the morrow, we took a ceremonious departure.

Arriving back at the camp, we found ourselves transported from centuries-old custom to one of the latest products of Western civilisation—wireless, which had been installed in the mess tent. Unfortunately, except for a few odd scraps of telephony such as "Hullo, Berlin, I want a line to London," little was heard, but the inhabitants of Kampa, who crowded in at the door of the mess tent, were vastly impressed by the melancholy squeaks and howls emitted by the instrument: they probably thought that we were invoking the spirits of the dead.

After breakfast next morning, I strolled up the ridge behind the camp, and seated myself on the sun-warmed sand. At my feet a slope littered with boulders fallen from crumbling sandstone crags, and patched with coarse yellow grass, sloped gently into the plain. Although I was only 200 feet above the plain, the view across it was extensive. Yellow and brown at first, it gradually lost its distinctive colouring in the distance. Beyond it, the Himalayan snows seemed suspended in mid-air above bands of purple haze. The white

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triangle of Everest, and Makalu's symmetrical pyramid, were both visible, whilst to the south were the Jonsong Peak and the complicated ridges of Kangchenjunga.

A little later the Deputy Dzongpen arrived to conduct us over the Dzong. He was attired in a plum-coloured robe surmounted by a blue silk waistcoat, and long strings of blue beads hung from his ears. A steep path led up to the Dzong, but before we entered the old building we turned some prayer wheels the size of beer barrels which must have sent out many thousands of prayers at every revolution.

Against primitive weapons, the Dzong could withstand an indefinite siege, provided it was adequately manned and provisioned, but a modern field gun would soon shatter its walls. We passed a heavy sealed door and were told that it guarded a granary, then groped our way up various other ladders in the dark interior and eventually emerged on to the flat roof. It was a sensational situation as only a low parapet separated us from a sheer drop of some hundreds of feet. Suspended from poles were various emblems: bunches of yak hair and sheaves of grass and willow. There was also a Buddha carved in a slab of rock, and a wheel of life. Far below was our camp, with its doll-like tents, whilst the brown plain was dotted black with the yaks which were to transport our stores over the next stage of the march.

Descending from the roof, we visited the library. Tibetan books are so bound that it seems almost impossible to read them, but as Shebby said, few would understand them, for they are too deeply

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philosophical for any but advanced scholars of Buddhism.

Our tour of inspection over, we descended to the camp, where we were met by an aggrieved George, who told us that he had been bitten by the expedition dog when visiting the store dump. This dog, named Policey by the porters, had been recently acquired by the expedition. She was a fierce Tibetan mastiff, and her job was to keep an eye on the stores. Obviously she had functioned all too well. Fortunately, it was not long before she was able to distinguish between authorised and unauthorised visitors to the store dump, but to begin with it was always a hazardous business to venture into her vicinity.

A mail arrived during the afternoon. In addition to some very welcome letters from home, it included a communication from a gentleman who styled himself "The Autograph King."

Before leaving Kampa we visited Dr. Kellas's grave. The inscription put up when he died in 1921 had fallen to pieces, so we erected a slab of sandstone and Shebby carefully measured and traced out an inscription,

A. M. Kellas,

1921.

Om Mani Padmi Hum¹

which the monks of the neighbouring monastery promised to chisel out. Then Shebby, the oldest member of the expedition, read Psalm 121, "I

¹ It was thought that this Buddhist prayer, which means "Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus," would encourage the local inhabitants to preserve the grave.

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will lift up mine eyes unto the hills," while the rest of us stood by with bared heads.

On this morning of brilliant clarity, Chomiomo, Pauhunri and Kangchenjau, the three peaks climbed by this great pioneer, were full in view beyond the brown plain. Few rest in such a place; it commands one of the grandest panoramas in the world.

During the day, Eric, Ferdie and I made an interesting little experiment. We climbed up the sandy slopes above the camp at the approximate rate of 400 feet an hour, the speed we expected to climb on the upper part of Everest. It seemed incredibly slow, and our pulses accelerated scarcely at all, and, when we stopped, almost immediately returned to normal. An interesting experiment: I wondered if we should remember it when we were gasping for breath thousands of feet higher on Everest.

CHAPTER V

THE TIBETAN PLATEAU

THE MORNING OF APRIL 2ND WAS CLOUDY. I ROSE early in order to hand my letters to Lobsang, who was taking the expedition mail to Gangtok. Henceforward, yaks and donkeys were to be our transport animals, and it was a brave sight to see them lumbering off in detachment after detachment across the plain.

From Kampa Dzong to Lingga is a fatiguing march of about 18 miles. Part of the way I walked with Hugo. We discussed plans, and he told me that he was in favour of parties of three on Everest, an arguable proposition as it meant a ruinous waste of man-power in the event of a reverse due to bad weather.

The wind rose at ten o'clock and as the day lengthened blew harder and harder, viciously whipping clouds of dust, mixed with an occasional stinging spatter of snow, into our faces.

At about half-way to Lingga we forded the Yaru Chu, and on the far bank discovered the one sheltered place on this otherwise windy march. But if it was an unpleasant march for us, it was far worse for the animals. April the Fifth was in

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a sorry state and had to be led by the bridle; as for the poor weebegone little donkeys, although less than half the size of yaks, they were laden as heavily as the latter, and it was a pitiful sight to see them plodding along. Now and again their legs would double up under them and they would sink to the ground, and have to be lifted upright by their cursing drivers before they could continue.

One of them foaled, but the mother was on her way again within five minutes of the birth and was loaded up less than an hour afterwards. Tibet is a rough, hard country for the beast of burden.

The last five miles lay across a plain of dried-up mud and swamps. Here the wind was blowing a gale, and with heads down and goggles over our eyes we struggled on against the blast. Innumerable dust devils rushed across this weary expanse in whirling columns hundreds of feet high, whilst the distant ranges showed dim and murky through the same all-pervading substance. An appropriate name for this plain, which extends for a score or more of miles south of Tengye Dzong, would be "The Plain of the Dust Devils."

The village of Lingga stands in the heart of the plain, and it is hard to imagine a more dismal situation. The camp had been pitched nearby, and when at length I arrived there, limp and tired, I found others equally tired sprawled on the floor of the mess tent. Wind, more than anything else, had taken it out of us that day.

There was a small lake close to the camp, and we saw bar-headed geese and Brahminy ducks. We would have shot a goose as it would have been

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a welcome addition to the cooking-pot, but it was part of our agreement with the Tibetan Government not to shoot wild life in Tibet.

It was a perfect night when I went to bed. The wind had miraculously fallen and the whole firmament glittered with hungry stars. Those who have only seen a night sky from lower and moister elevations can have no conception of its magnificence when viewed from the cold, moistureless "Roof of the World."

So far, I had not developed a sore throat as had several of the others, but I thought I was in for one that night, and in an endeavour to stave it off wore a Matthews respirator. Unfortunately I found it impossible to keep the mask on for long owing to a feeling of claustrophobia and suffocation. The latter, as Raymond explained later, was entirely imaginary, for as much air as the lungs normally require can be inhaled and exhaled without effort through the forty layers of wire gauze. Be that as it may, I could never breathe comfortably through this apparatus, though this is not to say that it might not be very useful in preventing sore throats during the march across Tibet and keeping the climber warm in high camps.

The temperature fell to 6° F. in the night, and ice an inch thick formed on the lake. An interesting question was: how did the geese and other water-fowl avoid being frozen in during the night? Shebby suggested that they migrate to the lower and warmer Kharta valley, but this seems doubtful as it is 60 miles away.

Following a chilly breakfast in the open, Shebby

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and I started off together at 7.30. The track between the marshes was in places hard and gravelly, and in others sandy and tedious, yet we averaged over 3 miles an hour, fair going at the height. According to Shebby, a procession of sick men had trailed across here in 1924, including Mallory, who was suspected of appendicitis, Beetham down with dysentery and Somervell with a very bad throat.

The morning was brilliant, and there was only one shining cloud, shaped like a long, thin dagger, with the point resting on the Jonsong Peak. We expected the wind to rise at any moment, but scarcely a zephyr rustled the coarse grasses, or stirred the pools which the hot sun had already freed of ice.

Everest was just in view over the Nyonna-range, and between it and Makalu rose the peak of Armadreme (pronounced Armadreamy), a mountain as beautiful as its name.

To walk with Shebby was an education, as he is an enthusiastic naturalist and particularly interested in ornithology. We saw and photographed a number of birds on the marshy pools, and none of them seemed in the least afraid of human beings. I felt positively ashamed at walking so comfortably when the poor little donkeys were once again struggling valiantly along, yet collapsing frequently beneath their appallingly heavy loads. They reminded me so vividly of the donkeys I used to ride on the sands when I was a boy, but those were jolly, happy little donkeys, loving their fun, and these were poor, scared morsels of animals, doomed to slavery until ex-

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hausted nature caused them to collapse for the last time, never to rise again. Their bones whiten beside the trade routes in Tibet.

It was a longer march than the map seemed to indicate. After we had passed the marshes I got very thirsty, and when at last we saw Tengye Dzong shimmering above the plain there was no saliva in my mouth and my tongue felt like a strip of leather.

Our camp was pitched close to a fair-sized lake opposite to the old Dzong, which, if not possessing the dramatic qualities of Kampa Dzong, is nevertheless a fine building; the modern "jerrybuilder" who disfigures the British countryside should take a trip to Tibet; he might gain some constructive ideas.

One disadvantage of travelling in Tibet is that transport has to be changed every time an expedition comes within the province of a new Dzongpen, so again Hugh donned his Tibetan coat and opera hat to receive the Dzongpen of Tengye. This dignitary having arrived with his retinue of servants, there followed a long haggle as to the hire price of transport animals for the next stage of our march, an occasion calling for the consumption of much whisky. Finally everything was settled amicably, and the Dzongpen, appreciably mellowed, promised us a great feast if we returned successful.

Little wind rose that day, and the temperature was well above freezing-point when we dined. The gramophone as usual caused great astonishment and amusement, and a Sola Khombu woman, a sister of one of our porters, who had

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joined the party, was especially intrigued by it, and on every occasion that it was played edged as near to it as possible, her broad face wreathed in delighted smiles.

Next morning, April 4th, was so warm that some of us breakfasted in pyjamas and overcoats. Canvas baths had been provided, and I had a hot bath in my tent. During the morning I photographed the camp and the local inhabitants, of whom the women, with big hoops over their heads, made excellent subjects. The people of Tengye Dzong were very curious, and the camp was besieged by ragged beggars whom Nursang and Lewa violently ejected at intervals. The country in the neighbourhood, as well as the beggars, reminded me of Egypt; the arid hills are the same yellowish brown and rise like the ghosts of hills against a dark-blue sky.

Compared to the Phari plain, Tengye was almost tropical. According to local information, the winter had been unusually dry, and we asked ourselves whether it was going to be a season of seasons, or would it break later and give us hell? A burning question that only time could solve. As Hugh said, "There is a tremendous spirit of optimism in this party." It was a necessary spirit, for, in the words of Paul Bauer, speaking of Kangchenjunga, "One has got to be an optimist to climb a great peak in the Himalayas."

In the afternoon our old enemy the wind remembered us, and squall after squall of dust beat down on the camp.

Apart from checking over stores there were various odd jobs. Waggers, who was attending

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to meteorology as well as geology, unpacked a barograph, but yak transport had reduced it to its component parts, and, although we tried to put it together, it was plain that it could never work.

For some obscure reason we were issued with crampons. I have found these useful in a cross-Channel boat or customs queue, as attached points outwards to the back of a rucksack they save their owner from being jostled, but on Himalayan expeditions they are an unmitigated nuisance and invariably puncture everything within reach.

That afternoon the first Olympiad in the history of Tengye Dzong was held amidst the utmost enthusiasm. It included some spectacular pole vaults by Jack Longland, an expert performer, the "pole" being a section of a wireless mast. Then Hugo Boustead, who had represented England at the (authentic) Olympic Games, demonstrated the art of boxing. He took on man after man among the porters. At first they were reluctant to hit a sahib, but soon warmed to the game, and Lhakpa Chedi attacked with great vigour; however, it was not long before Hugo proved to him that a little science is worth a world of unscientific attack, however vigorous it may be. But the real fun began when two porters put on the gloves; the scrap developed into a windmill-like affair and soon became so fast and furious that it had to be stopped. Finally, as a joke, various small Tibetan children were given the gloves and went for each other like true sportsmen amid roars of laughter. The football was also very popular and Nursang did his best to form the Sherpas into a rugger scrum; they

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and the Tibetans have the genuine sporting instinct.

After tea, Eric, Hugo, Bill and I walked about 1,500 feet up the hillside behind the camp, climbing some crags on the way, where we found a number of ammonites, evidence that this arid elevated plateau was formerly a sea-bed.

Tencheddar, the cook, once he was allowed to settle down in any one place for some days, usually managed to produce something good, and for dinner that night we had a well-flavoured curry, followed by stewed apples. I suspect, however, that it was the bottle of sloe gin afterwards, combined with some previous entertainment given by the Dzongpen to Hugh, Shebby, Raymond and George, that contributed to the general hilarity with which the evening ended. The only absentee was Willy McLean, who was in bed with a chill.

With a 17 miles march before us, and two passes to cross, we were away early next morning. Less than a mile from the camp we passed the village of Tengye, a tumble-down place with flat roofs and a young forest of willow wands to ward off devils. Presently we heard a harsh cawing from some crags and thought it was magpies, until we saw dozens of partridge-like birds, identified by Bill as chicaw. There were also numerous sleek, well-fed hares which regarded us with mild interest before loping up the stony hillsides.

The route lay up a rocky valley with reddish crags on either hand splashed with dark-green clumps of juniper, then over a col adorned with the usual cairns and prayer flags and down to

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another arid valley where we halted for a bite of food. On the way up to the next col the wind made itself felt and I waited an hour in a sheltered place for Tensing, who had my windproof suit. Then I mounted April the Fifth (incidentally it *was* April 5th), but the poor old thing jibbed at the steep slope up to the 16,000 feet pass, and I ended by more or less pulling her up. On the pass the mail runner overtook us and, forgetting the wind, we opened our letters on the spot and devoured the news from home.

On the far side of the pass, the route descended precipitous rocks and shale, then long, sandy slopes to another valley containing a dried-up, sandy water-course, as wide and smooth as an arterial road. This valley debouched into yet another and wider valley, in which were some villages. At long last we saw the welcoming green speck of the mess tent and were soon supine within it out of reach of the abominable dust-filled wind, thankfully aware that a long, dull march, with quite 3,000 feet of ascent thrown in, was behind us.

Willy, who had not yet recovered from his chill and had ridden all the way, pronounced the local water as being unfit for human consumption, so we had to boil and filter it, a slow and tantalising process to thirsty men. In the matter of food we were even unluckier, for the transport animals had lagged behind and it was a long time before we had anything to eat. When at last some stores arrived, we had a gargantuan feast of ham and tea, biscuits, butter and jam. Supper was a scratch affair, but Tencheddar and Lhakpa Chedi

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rose to the occasion and produced some more ham, scrambled eggs and cocoa. Not all the transport had arrived, and for once we sat on the floor of the mess tent—which, incidentally, was far safer than the expedition chairs, which had a knack of collapsing and depositing their occupants on the floor without warning.

The night was warm, 4° above freezing, and a half moon shed radiance on the hills. I finished my diary in my tent with the barking of Polacey in my ears. Night after night she rendered the landscape hideous; as, apart from George, she had already bitten four Tibetans, we wondered what her total bag would be by the end of the expedition.

Our next march to the village of Dochen was only nine or ten miles, but the wind made short work of any gratitude we might have felt. The valley was filled with whirling sand devils, and clouds of choking dust came rolling along like a series of gas attacks. Had it not been for this abominable wind we might have enjoyed the grassy camping place at Dochen, with its view of Shankar-ri, a thin, graceful rock peak 20,000 feet high. We camped early and after lunch Ferdie looked in at my tent and suggested a walk over the hill behind the camp. Two hundred feet up the hillside is a stone cell at the entrance to a small cave. It had no door and merely narrow slits in its walls. Possibly a hermit had sealed himself within it and the slits served the dual purpose of providing him with light and air and allowing the villagers to pass through food and drink. What unnatural things are done in the name of religion!

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That a creature of flesh and blood should shut himself away from the sun to brood in a gloomy cell a few feet square is an unconscious commentary on the ignorance of the human race and the darkness of the human mind.

To avoid the wind, we kept to the lee-side of a ridge, going very slowly as a high-altitude discipline, yet we climbed at about one thousand feet an hour, and found we could converse without effort or breathlessness.

The ridge led between a minor hill and a tall conical hill with a monastery perched high up on it, to a col whence we saw two high peaks in the north-west marked on the map as exceeding 21,000 feet. Considering their height, it was astonishing how little snow they carried. Southwards, the weather was in poor shape and the Himalayas were concealed by clouds extending to the Nyonna-ri range in Tibet.

An easy scree-run took us rapidly down to camp. Arriving there, we found a surgical operation in progress. During the march the ponies of Karma Paul and Lobsang Tsering had fallen. Karma Paul had broken a little finger and Lobsang Tsering a collar bone. Owing to muscular contraction, it was found impossible to set the collar bone without an anæsthetic, and the mess tent was turned into a temporary hospital. Chloroform was administered by Raymond while Willy stood by to set the broken bone, but soon after he became unconscious Lobsang's heart stopped. The only hope of getting it going again, short of a massage involving a major operation, was an injection of coramine. This drug was in

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one of several medical boxes in Raymond's tent, and Raymond was not sure which one. Happily, by great good fortune, Hugh, who hastened to look for it, found it in the first box he opened. The hypodermic needle was jabbed into the patient's heart, an upsetting process for a layman to watch, and the heart started to work again; it had stopped for about a minute and a half. As Lobsang was a strong fellow this was almost certainly due to the altitude, and Raymond said afterwards that in future operations at high altitudes he would administer oxygen with an anæsthetic.

Owing to dust suspended in the atmosphere, the sun had little power next morning and breakfast in the open was a shivery affair. Bill and I left camp together. The going was fatiguing owing to incipient sand dunes, but April the Fifth seemed in fine fettle. The river winds sinuously between earthy cliffs, deeply eroded in places, and the country in general was my conception of the Arizona desert.

After three miles we forded the shallow river, beyond which the country was rougher and the path wound over a barren, sandy hillside where a low, scrubby bush somehow managed to find nourishment. Finally, a steep descent over a slope of loose sand to a causeway and a bridge across the river brought us to our camping site, a flat space in a bight of earthy cliffs partially sheltered from the wind.

At lunch in the mess tent there was a discussion on leisure for the working-classes and what they should do with it, but my diary does not record

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any definite conclusions. Presumably they should do what they like with their leisure. Having no liking for the interminable arguments in the mess tent, I found it more amusing to sit on the hillside above the camp and send down miniature avalanches of sand, in the movement of which there was something equable, ordered and definite.

After tea, Hugh, Hugo, Eric and I scaled a hill directly above the camp. We went slowly enough to carry on a conversation, yet we climbed about 2,000 feet in one and a half hours and reached a height of about 16,000 feet. The wind was strong, but not excessively cold, and the rocks we scrambled over reminded me of the Crib Goch ridge in North Wales.

Eric and I went well together. His pace suited mine perfectly and I believe the opposite held true; we had climbed together on Kamet, I hoped we should do so again on Everest. One of the things that worried me slightly was not knowing for certain with whom I was going to climb on Everest. That few of us were used to climbing together was a serious weakness in the expedition, and it was a pity that the years between 1924 and 1933 had not been profitably utilised in building up a homogeneous Everest party. To a mountaineer the possibility of having to climb on the highest mountain of the world with someone with whom he has never climbed before is disturbing. A party must move as one man to stand a chance of success.

We gained the summit of our hill as a red-rimmed sun was sinking behind blue dust-beared ranges. The scene reminded me of a mist-haunted

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day in the Isle of Skye, and a silvery thread-work of rivers on the dim plain at our feet almost completed the illusion.

Hugh had been cogitating several problems for some days, and he made known to us his ideas after dinner. The Camp 1 of former expeditions was to be virtually a base camp, Camp 4 on the North Col was to be made as luxurious as possible, and Ferdie was to be in charge of the glacier camps. A lengthy discussion followed on ways and means of climbing the mountain. The general opinion was that if an attempt failed before the monsoon we should wait to see whether another could be made during or even after the monsoon; at the same time the whole strength of the party must be devoted to a pre-monsoon attempt. There was some divergence of opinion on the problems of acclimatisation and deterioration. For my part, I was against remaining too long on the North Col. Eric and I knew that we reached the top of our form quickly and that once our peak of acclimatisation was passed we might deteriorate equally quickly if we remained at a high altitude. Some acclimatise early, others late; and some deteriorate earlier than others. It was a formidable problem with many unknown factors.

The wind was blowing gustily when I went to bed and Policey was making a throaty noise suggesting that she had just connected with someone's leg. For some reason I had an aching back, and was again upset internally, so that I did not sleep well. It was a windy night and the damp air from the river helped to chill the camp.

The march next day, April 8th, was long and

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tiring. Some difficulty was experienced in getting the transport off. As usual the donkeys were grossly overloaded, but what could we do when no more transport was available?

We crossed one of the tributaries of the Arun river by a shallow ford. It is strange country hereabouts. The valley floor is flat, three or four miles wide and virtually a desert with innumerable sand dunes arranged in regular ranks by the wind. Many miles away in the south rose a high snow peak, probably Makalu, whilst to the east and south-east stretched the Nyonna-ri range, not an impressive range from this direction as the higher peaks are mostly concealed by nearer ridges, except for the thin, wedge-like spire of Shankar-ri.

For five miles it was hard work over loose sand, a distance that had proved too much for the aged and exhausted donkeys of former travellers, for there were several bleached skeletons half-buried in the shifting sand, and we were glad to turn north-west up the valley of the Bhong Chu, where by the river there was a level expanse of warm turf. We sank down gratefully and ate our lunch. The sun was hot and there was no wind, and it was delightful to lie at our ease with the bells of the transport train tinkling from the plain behind us and the low music of the gently flowing river in our ears. To complete the idyll a skylark approached to within a yard of us and hopped along the line of our recumbent figures, narrowly inspecting each of us in turn, whilst a mouse hare came out of its hole a few yards away and, after *satisfying itself of our peaceful intentions*, began to burrow industriously in the dry soil.

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The warmth had tempted numerous insects from their hiding places, but some met a premature fate in Raymond's poison bottle. Then some diving ducks moved leisurely down the stream until, disturbed by the passage of a stately lammergeier, they hurriedly rose and thudded away.

We had not rested long before our old enemy the wind discovered us, and the last part of the march to Trangso-Chumbab was in the teeth of dust-laden squalls. Camp was pitched on a dirty space where the wind raged, covering everything with clouds of filthy dust, doubtless infected by the neighbouring village. What a pity we did not camp on the clean sward where we had halted, but a large expedition is tied down to certain stages and the position of its camping grounds is dictated by the necessity for housing and feeding the yak and donkey drivers.

Before we turned in, Raymond, at Hugh's suggestion, read out aloud Norton's 1924 dispatch, in which he summed up the possibilities of climbing Everest. Afterwards Hugh and I had a long discussion by candle light in Hugh's tent as to whether or not the first party should be devoted solely to reconnoitring the north-east ridge to determine the possibility or impossibility of the second step. We both knew how difficult it was to decide anything at this stage; so much depended on the strength of the expedition when the time came for an attempt on the summit. Probably not more than six men would be able to go high, and of these not all would be capable of reaching the summit. On no account, therefore, must the two fittest men

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expend themselves on a reconnaissance. It was interesting to discuss quietly such complex problems, yet, when all was said and done, such discussions were purely academic. We must "wait and see."

CHAPTER VI
SHEKAR DZONG

PUNCTUALLY WITH THE SUN, OLD NIMA TENDRUP appeared bearing my canvas bucket of hot water. Being an Oriental, he always woke me gently. He would untie my tent, and his round, honest face like a blackened full moon would appear, then, if I was asleep, he would say, "Sahib! Sahib! Sahib!" gradually raising his voice until I woke.

Our march to begin with was across an arid sandy plain, but, on turning a corner, we were astonished to look down a cliff and see the river flowing through a country as fertile as any we had yet seen in Tibet. There were even scraggy, ill-nourished trees and, on the far side of the river, small hamlets surrounded by fields which are tilled with a perseverance that wrests sufficient for bare existence, and no more, from a poor soil. What would these people think, living as they do on the verge of starvation, could they see food dumped into the sea, or left to rot, so that the "prices" of an outworn capitalist system might be further bolstered up? There are no false values in Tibet.

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I was ambling gently along on April the Fifth with Ferdie when of a sudden there came a thudding of hoofs behind and, with a whoop, Willy and Hugo bore down upon us. The startled April the Fifth promptly bolted; one stirrup leather broke and away I went across the plain completely out of control, dimly aware that Ferdie's pony had bolted too. At length I managed to pull up and dismount, but next moment April the Fifth, now thoroughly roused, tore the reins out of my hand and took to her heels once more. It was surprising to see this unwonted energy in the old pony, and my momentary annoyance was replaced by a roar of laughter.

The wind rose early and assaulted us vigorously for the greater part of the march. The landscape was almost lunar in aspect, and gaunt brown and yellow hills splashed with reddish crags shivered in a dust-filled sky.

We camped soon after midday. A rocky little peak rose immediately to the north, and this Hugo and I climbed. We chose a steep route, and reached the summit buffeted by a strong and bitterly cold west wind. If the wind was as cold and hostile as this at 15,000 feet, what must it be like 10,000 feet higher on Everest? We agreed that a wind of equal force at 28,000 feet would paralyse a party and defeat an attempt on the summit.

The view from our hill was extraordinary. In every direction rose brown, waterless hills, desolate, wind-swept hulks of hills possessing neither the beauty of fertility nor the grandeur of the sublime: it was a dead country, fit only for

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the Wandering Jew and the spirits of the damned.

We looked in vain for Everest, but clouds filled the south; bad weather raged along the Himalayas. The sun was sinking in a fierce red glare as we descended, in strange contrast to the moon, poised serenely on the quickening flood of night.

As we neared the camp, we saw the donkey and yak drivers congregated by their fires. They had piled boxes of our stores around them for shelter and these were now scattered liberally over the landscape, obviously accessible to thieves.

A doleful tale awaited us. One of the drivers had deserted with his animals, after abandoning their loads by the wayside. Thanks to the transport officers, the loads had been collected and fresh animals procured. It had meant hard work for Lewa, and he did not reach camp until long after dark, tired out and scarcely able to speak for the dust that choked his throat.

The morning of April roth was chilly and again the sun shone with little power owing to the dust in the sky. Hugh, Shebby and I walked together the first hour or so, then I rode. April the Fifth was in splendid form; a week ago she had looked like dying and was stumbling dejectedly along, now she had quite recovered and her coat was becoming positively glossy.

At first we traversed a narrow, sandy valley enclosed by reddish disintegrating crags and slopes of screes. Moses might have passed through a similar valley on his way to the Promised Land, and with much the same primi-

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tive transport as ours, but not carrying the latest products of Western civilisation, such as wireless and the tinned products of Fortnum & Mason and the Army and Navy Stores. Then the path crossed a low pass, adorned with the usual cairns, Mani stones and prayer flags, and, after switch-backing over some small rises where the rising wind blew hard in our faces, finally debouched on to a gently sloping plain where the transport column stretched out like an attenuated dragon. Some miles distant rose a solitary yellowish crag with a little cluster of white objects on it—the famous monastery of Shekar Dzong, photographs of which are familiar to readers of Everest books.

We had heard stories of smallpox at Shekar and had decided to camp if possible two or three miles short of it, but after an hour or so, when we were rapidly nearing the village at the foot of the crag and there was no sign of the mess tent, we suspected that Karma Paul, who was ahead, had thought otherwise.

A car could be driven for miles across the gently inclined plain, and old April the Fifth broke spontaneously into a trot, and raced a Tibetan dignitary, also bound for Shekar; a pleasant-featured, smooth-skinned little man in a red silk dress and finely embroidered hat. I tried to converse with him in broken Nepali as we rode side by side, but my best efforts elicited nothing beyond unintelligible grunts accompanied by broad grins exposing a set of remarkably white and even teeth.

As we neared Shekar we were astonished at the

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fantastic beauty of the monastery, which is lodged on the precipitous side of a rock some 1,200 feet high. Possibly some enterprising builder, a lama perhaps, tired of the level places, and yearning for the heights, as well as security from marauders, fashioned a ledge whereon to build a dwelling, whence he could peacefully survey the world at his feet, and from this humble dwelling grew the great monastery. With its white walls ranged one upon the other, it is a stupendous feat of architecture and a grandiose gesture of defiance to the law of gravity. Above the monastery, a turreted battlemented wall rises almost vertically to the final extravagance, the ancient Dzong perched sublimely on the very pinnacle of the crag.

Karma Paul told us that there was no smallpox except in the monastery, and in a village to the north of the crag. Camp was accordingly pitched on some dried mud almost directly under the monastery. It was a filthy spot, the recipient of every wind that blew, and directly to leeward of the squalid village of Shekar, which deposited its infected dust straight on to the camp. Raymond was justly furious and disclaimed any responsibility for dysentery, smallpox, typhoid and any other disease the expedition might contract, but by the time he arrived it was too late to change the site, as the animals had been unloaded and the camp pitched.

Soon after we camped, the Dzongpen considerably sent his servants with a gift of tea, milk and chang, but we had scarcely had time to refresh ourselves before somebody discovered that the loads, which were still coming in on yaks, mules

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and donkeys, had been tampered with. Eleven pairs of porters' high-altitude boots, a tent, porters' windproof clothing and socks were missing and many ration boxes had been forced open and their contents rifled. The porters were furious at the loss of their kits, and before we could stop him Lewa violently set about one of the drivers. The four principal yak drivers were immediately arrested, tied up with leather thongs and handed over to the Dzongpen.

The thefts had been carried out with considerable ingenuity. In some cases lumps of turf had been substituted for the stolen articles to compensate for the loss of weight. Bottles of rum intended for the high camps had also been stolen, whilst many tins of food had disappeared or been slit open. Altogether about one hundred pounds' worth of equipment and food had been lost. A thorough check of stores was necessary and all the afternoon we laboured, beaten by the wind and half choked by the acrid dust.

At supper we washed the filthy dust from our throats with a hot punch of whisky, water, sugar and lemon juice. As usual the wind dropped at nightfall, and before turning in George and I went for a short walk. The dust had settled and a brilliant moon drowned all but the brighter stars. High above our heads on the dark and apparently inaccessible precipice was the monastery, its white walls glowing ethereally as though transparent and lighted from within. As we stood watching this strange and beautiful sight, the silence was broken by a low dirge-like sound rising and falling; the lamas were praying. Then came the

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mournful note of a deep-toned horn, and the slow percussion of a great drum. Both epitomised this changeless, mysterious country of Tibet. In the West civilisations might wax and wane, kings and dictators come and go, but Tibet would remain the same. Fortunate land that none covet it; in its barrenness lies its strength, in its winds and cold its protection from the greedy progress of the West.

The last notes quivered and died away in the crags and there was silence, a profound, wonderful silence, and in that silence a glorious meteor fell slowly in the north-east sky and disappeared behind a distant range. Did the lamas see it, and was it an answer to their prayers?

Next morning, I was unwell with severe colitic pains and vomiting. I was a little anxious; to contract dysentery at this stage would be a serious matter, not only for me, but for the expedition, which would want both its doctors on the mountain. Raymond made me up a draught of bicarbonate of soda and later Willy gave me a tablespoonful of castor oil, which I somehow managed to keep down between mouthfuls of whisky. After this, I lay supine in my sleeping-bag experiencing, every quarter of an hour or so, pains which seemed to twist me up inside into knots. Thanks, however, to these stringent measures, I was much more comfortable by lunch time though decidedly empty.

In the afternoon, the four men arrested as suspected thieves were publicly flogged by order of the Dzongpen. Rutledge in his official capacity of leader had to attend the ceremony and he was

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accompanied by various other members of the expedition. Three hundred lashes with rawhide whips was the portion of the unfortunate men. We were pretty sure that they were guilty, but to inflict punishment upon them without trial savoured too much of "Alice in Wonderland": "sentence first, verdict afterwards."

When the sightseers returned, they said that the beating was not a severe one as punishments go in Tibet—a hundred lashes apiece, which were received with stoical indifference. The object of the beating was to extort confession, but none of the four accused men would admit guilt. Doubtless a few pairs of good boots were worth a good deal more to them than one hundred lashes.

Quite a ceremony was made of the punishment, if it could justly be called punishment. It was administered in an open courtyard with the Dzongpen occupying one house-top and members of the expedition the other. There were two official whippers, and at the end of every ten strokes the accused men were asked if they wanted to confess. This would appear the usual procedure in Tibet, and a suspected criminal, whether innocent or guilty, is thrashed before his trial, just in case he happens to be guilty and confesses, thus saving the "court" a world of trouble. Whether he is sentenced to further punishment if he confesses I do not know. Flogging is a comparatively mild punishment in a criminal code which includes the cutting off of ears and limbs.

By the evening I was much better, but to make the cure certain Raymond gave me a dose of

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bacteriophage. As there was nothing whatever left in me I slept well, but woke once to hear some other unfortunate vomiting.

The morning of April 12th was cold and sunless; there was a slate-grey pall in the south and snow was falling in the Everest region. My sick partner turned out to be Tom Brocklebank, another victim of the foul germ-laden dust.

Policey was doing her job well. During the morning more than one lama from the monastery, whose curiosity outran his discretion, had to flee for his life. At lunch there was a discussion as to whether alcohol should be taken to the high camps. The only contribution I could make to this was to point out that rum had proved successful as a warming night-cap on Kamet. On the question of spirits I agreed with Raymond that when a temporary stimulation has passed away, the body is left colder than it was before. I have noted this in the Alps. Probably the high sugar content of rum is responsible for its warming properties, and my experience is that a hot non-alcoholic beverage such as chocolate is as valuable in promoting a warm and comfortable sleep.

After lunch, several of us visited the monastery under the guidance of Sonam Topchi Lama, one of the under sirdars. After crossing a shallow river, which combines the functions of "company's water" and main drain of Shekar, we passed along a narrow lane bordered by Mani stones, then up a steep path, pausing to stone an aggressive dog *en route* (the fiercest Tibetan

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mastiffs are not proof against accurate stone-throwing) and through a massive gateway into the monastery. The first thing we noticed was the stink from the sewage which trickled down the slimy gutters of the narrow streets. Once used to this—and the traveller's nose soon acclimatises itself to the foulest smells—we examined with interest the massive buildings with their narrow smoke-begrimed latticed windows, rising tier upon tier on the steep face of the crag. Then, turning off the main street, we were conducted through another gateway gaudily painted with scenes from the life of Buddha into a rectangular courtyard whence rose two poles the height and girth of telegraph poles, adorned with prayer flags. A flight of stone steps led up to a temple, and at the foot of them some men were busily engaged in pouring tea from large buckets into beautifully chased silver teapots which, being filled, were borne with much pomp and ceremony down the courtyard to the far end, where about two hundred lamas were assembled, squatting on the ground.

The lamas were attired in dark-red habits, with one arm bare to the shoulder, the symbol of poverty. Their faces, necks, hands and arms were dark from the smoke of countless shing¹ fires, and each was provided with a brass tea-cup. The teapots were placed on the ground and the men deputed to pour out the tea prostrated themselves before them in prayer; then the lamas, still squatting on the ground, held out their tea-cups to be

¹ Dried yak dung in this instance; the only fuel in many parts of Tibet. Shing is a generic name in Tibet for fuel of any kind.

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filled. As each lama received his portion, a priest who accompanied the pourer mumbled a prayer, which he terminated with a clap of his hands. It was a striking and picturesque ceremony, but I have no doubt that some of our Christian ceremonies would seem equally strange to a Tibetan.

After taking many photographs, to which the lamas did not object in the least, we were escorted up the steps into the main temple of the monastery. It was almost completely dark inside, and until our eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom we slipped and stumbled about on the uneven stone slabs forming the floor. Presently we made out a number of long benches raised a few inches from the floor, and covered with the same dull-red fabric as the lamas wear, arranged, not at right angles to the three sacred images at one end of the temple, but longitudinally. We mounted some steps to a chancel and examined the images, which were partially lit by a small window. They were gorgeously painted and bejewelled, the centre one having what appeared to be a magnificent diamond set in its forehead. Those to right and left were smaller than the central figure, and before all three were little butter lamps, placed between brass bowls containing water, on a shelf covered in red brocade. Behind and above these images loomed a huge and majestic Buddha. It was a pity that the many elaborately painted and embroidered prayer banners which decorated the temple should be wrapped in perpetual gloom. Why should religion and gloom be inseparably associated? Does gloom make worship easier?

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And if so, why? In one wall of the temple were hundreds of pigeon holes containing books, but we had no opportunity to examine these; doubtless they were philosophical works pertaining to Buddhism.

Next, we were shown another temple where the former abbots of the monastery were embalmed in wooden boxes. Finally, we were conducted to a room and invited to seat ourselves on cushions. A large number of curios and trinkets were then placed before us and offered for sale. I purchased a copper charm-box, a tea-cup in Chinese silver and an amulet inlaid with turquoises. It was very evident that the lamas had a keen eye towards business and had no objection to Indian money in exchange for their wares. I would have welcomed an opportunity of purchasing something really unique, such as one of the silver teapots, but nothing of this nature was forthcoming despite the requests of Karma Paul, who acted as bargainer in chief on our behalf.

Our purchases made, we climbed up the loose pastry-like rock above the monastery to the old fort crowning the crag. This had been long disused, and its crumbling walls leaned so precariously over the precipice that it seemed as though a good push would send them crashing on top of the monastery some hundreds of feet beneath.

We crept cautiously up steep flights of stairs, being careful not to touch broken beams and masses of tottering masonry, and emerged on to the roof. Once there our eyes turned instinctively in the direction of Everest. Immediately we saw

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it; there was no mistaking the huge, gaunt pile wedging the southern sky.

It was a cloudy, stormy evening, with lurid banks of cumulus cloud piled on the Himalayas, but Everest stood a little apart from the storm centre and we could clearly distinguish the north-east shoulder and the north face falling towards the North Col, which was concealed behind a nearer ridge. Snow had fallen of late, but the wind was clearing it away and dark rock ribs projected like bones through a thin white skin. There was no light or shadow to relieve the harsh black and white of rock and snow, and in the dull light the great mountain looked very forbidding.

As the sun dropped near the horizon the queer crumbling walls about us glowed a lurid red and the shadow of the rock on which we stood, with the Dzong clearly outlined and blunting its sharp point, crept across the plain.

The descent from the roof was unpleasant, as we felt that the unstable pile through which we crept by devious passages and stairways was ready to collapse on us at any moment, and it was a relief to tread the mountainside.

By the time we had regained the camp, the sunlight had passed from the Dzong, but some shining hills in the east cast a faint reflection upon it, so that it glowed faintly rose against a deep-green sky.

In the night there was a great commotion. The porters, not unnaturally, had made the most of their stay at Shekar and had quickly made the discovery that the local chang was particularly potent. Lhakpa Chedi, up to date a model of

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sobriety and discretion, had let himself go for once, and there was a tremendous hullabaloo when he and some of his friends returned to camp. But we could hardly blame our men; there was little jollity ahead of them.

CHAPTER VII

THE BASE CAMP

FIVE DAYS ONLY SEPARATED US FROM THE BASE Camp, and with feelings of thankfulness we saw the newly hired transport animals arrive on the morning of April 13th, and knew we could leave Shekar; there is little doubt that a serious illness would have occurred had we remained in its filthy precincts.

From Shekar the route was first of all through a narrow earthy gully where the transport animals jammed and some of the loads suffered severely. It was a dull, grey day, and the high hills were veiled in drizzling snow, but we welcomed this as dull days are usually windless in Tibet.

I rode April the Fifth and was accompanied by Ferdie. In another narrow section of the path we got mixed up with a number of transport mules, one of which lashed out and caught April the Fifth a nasty smack on the muzzle. There was an awkward drop from the path into the stream, but the old pony took the blow in good part and did not bolt as Relling would have done.

After this the route followed a dry, sandy water-

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course, then passed over a brow and descended a shaley hillside to a bridge over the Bhong Chu. As usual, April the Fifth lagged behind. I was resigned to her snail-like progress and half asleep when suddenly she leapt forward with a bound that nearly unseated me and careered at a gallop of at least twelve miles an hour across the Bhong plain. Policey had come up behind and slyly seized her tail.

Camp was pitched on refreshingly clean turf near the village of Pangle. I arrived simultaneously with a snowstorm; in a few minutes the ground was white; then the clouds stole away and the sun came out.

After tea several of us climbed a hill rising about 1,000 feet above the camp, and from the summit looked westwards along the wide, irregular valley of the Bhong Chu with its queer little conical-shaped hills all steaming like volcanoes with wind-driven snow.

For dinner that evening Tencheddar produced some of the best coffee we had yet tasted. Why he could not always make good coffee was an unsolved mystery. But we were a shivering company in the mess tent, and were glad to escape from the bitter cold into our sleeping-bags.

Hugh woke us at dawn next morning, April 14th, in the hope that we would reach the Pangle La in time to see Everest before the clouds gathered. Unfortunately an earlier start than usual, even when notified to the cook the night before, is liable to upset kitchen arrangements, the Oriental being a slave to habit and unadaptable in the matter of time, and, after standing about

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and cursing in the cold, we ended by breakfasting at the usual time.

It was obvious when we began the ascent to the pass that we were unlikely to see anything owing to snow-charged clouds in the south. I began the day on April the Fifth, but the poor old thing seemed to think our way was downhill, and great was her surprise and chagrin when she found that she was expected to climb more than 3,000 feet. However, I let her off lightly and walked most of the way with Waggars, though in point of fact she went well, despite her age, and did not blow like some of the other ponies, which were obviously feeling the altitude.

It was a tiring and monotonous trudge to the pass. The wind had formed little stilettos of ice on every projecting stone and the scene was desolate and bleak. The Pangle La is 18,000 feet and, as long as I made no conscious attempt to hurry, I found myself ascending at almost sea-level speed. It was a matter of rhythm and of adjusting each step to the lungs. On a hillside a song which fits the pace is immensely helpful, and often I discover some ditty to govern my legs and breathing.

Cairns and prayer flags adorned the pass. Of Everest there was nothing to be seen, and the southern sky was filled with leaden clouds and blue-grey curtains of falling snow. There was little colour and the view was a drab monotone like a fogged negative. The biting wind did not invite a halt, so Ferdie, Tom and I climbed a hill to the east of the pass. Easy walking brought us to the summit, which is about 600 feet above the

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pass. Beyond was a higher and more shapely summit which we climbed at our own speed: mine was certainly not less than 1,500 feet an hour, and possibly as much as 2,000 feet, and I felt extraordinarily fit and well acclimatised. The wind blew harder and harder as we gained height, and I was interested to see how my windproof suit would withstand it. It did so admirably, and it was a relief to know that in all probability it would be equally effective against the far colder winds of Everest. According to an aneroid, the second hill was 18,750 feet high. There was a cairn on the summit and a bunch of willow-wands and prayer flags which seemed to show that, like us, the Tibetans are not satisfied with merely crossing a pass and have an eye for a view. In clear weather there must be a splendid view of Everest, but on this occasion not a single high peak was visible. The clouds extended to the remote east and west and the low hills beneath them looked unusually dreary, whilst barren valleys without an apparent vestige of vegetation and unlit by sunlight stretched for miles.

There was no object in prolonging a halt in the icy wind, and I raced down slopes of snow and scree to the south of the pass where the transport was winding sinuously along. The donkeys were having something worse than a hard day, but fortunately there were spare ones, so that when one collapsed tired out, its load could be transferred to a fresher beast. We passed through a striking gorge and noticed a dizzy path high up on the cliffs of its west side leading to a hermit's cave. A pleasantly warm sandy valley brought us to a

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camping ground in a willow grove, hard by the village of Tashidzom, a charming spot where newly born lambs gambolled in the meadows.

Shebby and George had a gruelling time supervising the transport over the pass. George was almost always last in camp, which meant that he had to put up with more wind and dust than the rest of us, but he never complained and was always his cheerful exuberant self.

After the dust of Shekar plus laboured breathing in the cold, dry air when ascending to the pass, sore throats were very evident, and Shebby had a particularly nasty cough, which attacked him most of all at night and must have interfered with his sleep a great deal. I had much to be thankful for in having so far escaped the worst of the sore-throat curse. We arrived very thirsty at Tashidzom, and I drank enormous quantities of strong tea, and paid the penalty with a restless night, which Policey did not improve by barking for hours on end, so that I was tempted to retaliate with an ice axe on more than one occasion. Still, it was some compensation for lying awake to hear the sighing of the wind in the willows. On the march and later on Everest, I had many bad nights, yet at high altitudes the hours pass more readily than they do at low levels. Sleep does not seem so necessary; it is sufficient to rest the body. The most disagreeable effect of sleeplessness is a host of trivial yet worrying thoughts which are sometimes concentrated into fancied and absurd grievances. These in their turn are responsible for a deterioration of judgment and an upset of mental balance which can be a serious menace to

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the smooth working of an expedition. Such deterioration—"bloody-mindedness" is cruder but more descriptive—is best countered by experience and knowledge of high-altitude conditions, for this helps to maintain a sense of proportion. Thus, instead of loathing the method by which your companion imbibes his soup, you merely tell yourself that your loathing is inspired by altitude and that your own method is probably just as disgusting to him. Once this idea is planted in the mind, it will never cease to bear the fruit of tolerance, sympathy and understanding.

Next morning I was unwell. There were shivers down my back and my inside was all awry. I was not the only seedy one; the dust of Shekar had wreaked havoc on throats and many of the porters could only speak in whispers.

The march from Tashidzom to Chö-Dzong is about 12 miles and lies along a monotonous valley. It was a fine morning, but quickly-forming clouds soon obscured the view we should have had of Everest, whilst plumes of wind-driven snow writhed from the hill-tops.

The camping ground at Chö-Dzong was exposed to every wind that blew, and once again our belongings and food were covered with dust. Later in the day, Eric and I climbed a 17,000 feet hill to the north of the camp. My chill, or whatever it was, had passed away during the march and I felt fit and strong again. The clouds were dissolving and presently Everest showed over the snow-clad ridges. There were many fine summits in the south, but none to dispute this vast peak. For some time it was indistinct, but presently,

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when the sun sank, the mists clinging to it released their hold and floated away. We trained the telescope and were surprised to see how little snow had found refuge on the rocks. The northern face had been swept bare by a westerly wind that was still raging in unbridled fury and driving the snow from the north-east ridge in a tenuous banner miles long. It was a fearsome sight, and not even the warm glow of the setting sun could mitigate its cold ferocity. We gazed intently at the upper part of the mountain, but our view was not encouraging. It was plain that the rocks were very steep, and that Everest was no easy mountain, even by Alpine standards. The second step looked uncompromising, but to the north of it we noticed a recess half-filled with snow, though neither of us liked the look of a long smooth-looking slab above it. When viewing a high mountain in detail from an elevation where comfortable breathing is possible, it is not easy to estimate difficulty, for difficulty cannot be dissociated from altitude. The final pyramid, which appears slightly foreshortened from the Base Camp, was seen in its true relationship with the rest of the mountain. If the second step could be climbed there was a choice of two routes: directly up a conspicuous triangular snow slope, or up the rocky north face of the pyramid to the right of this. If, however, Norton's traverse route proved practicable, we should probably have a choice of three routes, two of which finish up the summit ridge of the mountain from the north-east and the third up the north-west ridge. I must confess to some pessimism on first seeing Norton's traverse.

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In the gathering shadows the head of the great couloir which it crosses looked very forbidding. How much better from a mountaineering standpoint was the ascent by the north-east ridge as compared with this unpleasant-looking route leading far out on to the slabby face of the mountain.

As we gazed the last glow faded and Everest relapsed to an austere grey against a rapidly darkening sky where the first stars sparkled.

The descent was an easy scree-run, and soon we were telling Ruttledge what we had seen.

We were a cheerful company at breakfast next morning, knowing that in a few hours we should be camped in the Rongbuk valley within sight of Everest. From Chö-Dzong, the valley gradually bends southwards, then it narrows and the hills on either hand become more precipitous, and the stream more turbulent. Presently we came to the two crags at the entrance of the Rongbuk valley, dubbed by Norton "the gates of altitude," because the traveller who passes between them is immediately conscious of having left the plateau of Tibet and of being on the threshold of Everest. Beyond, the hillside is steep and craggy and the path narrow. It was heavy work for the donkeys, for their loads were continually bumping against out-jutting rocks and many of them collapsed from fatigue, only to be heaved on to their feet again and beaten and blasphemed into renewed activity.

We turned a corner; Everest should have been visible, but clouds filled the head of the valley. There had been a recent and severe blizzard, as in places snowdrifts concealed the path, whilst a

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bitter wind sweeping along the desolate valley whipped powdery snow into our faces.

The Rongbuk monastery came into view, with its tiers of low buildings on a brown hillside. We pitched camp near it and were glad to escape into the mess tent from a searching wind. During the afternoon the mists slowly broke up and by tea-time Everest stood revealed, bathed in sunshine. Though the height of the north face is about 10,000 feet from the head of the Rongbuk glacier to the summit, it was difficult to estimate the scale of the mountain. The North Peak approaches 25,000 feet in height, yet appears relatively insignificant beside its great neighbour. In colour Everest is an ochreish brown with a pronounced band of light-yellow sandstone traversing it horizontally 1,000 feet below the summit. Norton and Somervell's route was along this "yellow band" as it is now known. The two most prominent features of the mountain are the great couloir, which cleaves the northern face from the foot of the final pyramid almost to the Rongbuk glacier, and the huge snowy plinth which supports the north-west extremity of the mountain. In one respect Nature has sadly blundered; the North Peak, a massive, ugly mountain, conceals the sublime fall of the north face. Seen from this direction the highest mountain of the world deserves a finer setting.

We unpacked the astronomical telescope, and examined the mountain. Opinions formed a trifle hastily the previous day were discussed anew. There seemed just a possibility that the second step could be climbed directly from the crest of the north-east ridge, for the telescope revealed the

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suggestion of a snow slope on the far side. Was it possible that the step was a fraud and that the crest of the ridge was continuous at this point? The available evidence made this seem very unlikely. Once the step was climbed the remainder of the ridge did not appear formidable, though the final snow slope on the face of the pyramid was steep. As regards Norton's traverse; if the head of the great couloir could be crossed and a conspicuous sloping scree-covered shelf attained at the base of the final pyramid, the summit should prove accessible. An obvious place to pitch the highest camp was on a snow-covered ledge below the first step at a height of about 27,800 feet.

Later, when a quick rush of sunset fired the great pile of rock, we forgot to consider detail and could only admire the fierce beauty of our adversary. Darkness fell swiftly, and when I turned into my tent the sky sparkled with innumerable stars and lightning flickered in the southern sky. The night was very cold, it seemed to me the coldest we had so far experienced, though the altitude, 16,000 feet, may have increased the apparent coldness, and I for one shivered in my sleeping-bag and woke with my beard icy from my congealed breath.

April 17th was Easter Monday; oranges and bottles on Hampstead Heath; for us, a blessing at the Rongbuk monastery. We straggled to the monastery, armed with numerous cameras, passing *en route* a great chorten, which stands apart from the monastery and makes an impressive photograph with Everest in the background, and passed into a courtyard where two lamas were

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stationed, blowing for all they were worth into curiously shaped horns which made a noise reminiscent of the fog-horn near the Goodwin Sands. The walls of the courtyard had been recently painted in gaudy colours. To Western notions, some of the paintings were frankly obscene, but in Tibet it is the object of an artist to portray all aspects of human existence, not merely those calculated to pass muster with local watch committees. The God of War was particularly impressive, and the ruthless evilness of his countenance certainly symbolised the passions of combative men.

We were conducted through a doorway, and passing along a dark passage climbed two flights of steps, steep and slippery enough to merit considerable caution in nailed boots, on to a sort of roof verandah, at one end of which was a large glass-windowed cabinet, some 8 ft. in height and 6 ft. in breadth, for all the world like a telephone booth. Within this cabinet the venerable Abbot of the monastery was waiting to bless the expedition, and he beamed upon us a welcoming smile so broad that his face seemed almost to divide into two halves. It did not take us long to realise that we were in the presence not only of a genial soul, but one of the great personalities of Tibet; humour, wisdom, kindness, sympathy and understanding all shone in his large and mobile face.

Hugh tendered the respects of the expedition through Karma Paul, and presents were ceremoniously given and received. Ours were two finely brocaded cloths, a tea set and a leather suit-

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case. The last made the greatest impression, and we could only hope that it would prove useful. The Abbot's gift to us consisted of two dried sheep and a bag of meal, valuable commodities in this barren valley.

After these exchange of gifts he asked after the health of the "General Sahib": General Bruce is well remembered here. Then he wished us complete success and enjoined caution. If only, he said, we remembered to pray we should succeed.

Next came the blessing ceremony. The porters had been provided with a rupee each to present to the monastery and the usual ceremonial scarves, but many added their own money to the official gift, whilst some who had no scarves were given back those already presented so that they might present them in their turn. As the men approached the cabinet, they salaamed profoundly, many going down on hands and knees and touching their heads thrice on the stone floor. Then they presented their scarves and money, whereat the Abbot responded with a muttered blessing and touched each man's head with a small prayer wheel, whereupon the supplicant backed away, receiving as he did so a ribbon and a packet of sacred seeds from one of the attendant lamas.

When our turn came, for some reason, which my friends could doubtless explain, my appearance provoked a roar of laughter from the Abbot; indeed the old man chuckled and trembled to such an extent that I thought he would have an apoplectic fit. All of us had to say Om Mani Padmi Hum, but the Abbot was not at all satisfied with

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my pronunciation of the prayer and made me repeat it several times. Finally he consented to be photographed and posed before a battery of cameras and cine-cameras.

From the Rongbuk monastery to the Base Camp is a walk of about five miles. We passed the village of Rongbuk, which must be one of the bleakest as well as one of the highest villages in the world, and followed the wide, gently sloping floor of the valley. That it is a holy valley is evidenced by the number of Mani walls, and in point of fact it is said that a former ruler of Tibet decreed that it should be preserved as a bird sanctuary, and that no life must be taken within sight of the sacred mountain of Chamolang (Everest).

To the west rises a finely shaped ice peak, reminding me of the Zermatt Weisshorn, whilst the eastern side of the valley is bounded by steep reddish crags. In one place an immense landslide had pushed a tongue over 100 feet thick some distance across the level valley floor, and piles of Mani stones had been placed at the edge of the debris, presumably to propitiate the mountain gods, whilst on the debris itself a hermit had constructed a cell, doubtless on the very reasonable assumption that another landslide was unlikely to occur at the same place.

After three or four miles of almost level going we came to the terminal moraine of the Rongbuk glacier, and, passing between large mounds of stones, arrived at a strip of coarse grass by the side of a frozen pool which the old hands identified as the site of the 1924 Base Camp. At first sight

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it did not appear in the least comfortable, but later, when we were at higher and far more uncomfortable camps, we should probably compare it with the Elysian Fields.

The wind was blowing gustily up the valley from the north, so, while the porters busied themselves with pitching the tents, some of us crossed over the moraine ridge to the south of the camp, and basked in the sun on the windless side. The cairn commemorating the three previous expeditions had been built on this ridge in 1924, but it had since fallen down or, what appeared more likely, been deliberately destroyed by the superstitious Tibetans, and only a few scattered fragments with the remains of names upon them were to be seen.

The march across the plateau had told upon the party and several were unwell. Tommy was suffering from altitude more severely than anyone, and it was feared that he had strained his heart, Ferdie had developed lung trouble, whilst Wyn had a nasty chill, bad enough to be called influenza. Then there was a crop of sore throats, and one or two could only speak in whispers. I was one of the few who could count themselves fairly fit, though an aching back, due possibly to my motor accident, made the carrying of a rucksack irksome.

Our arrival at the Base Camp coincided with Raymond's birthday, not a very happy anniversary considering the number of his patients, and we celebrated it that evening with a first-rate dinner on which Tencheddar was warmly complimented. Now that the kitchen was properly

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installed and feeding arrangements centralised, we looked forward to better meals than we had had during the march. The altitude, 16,800 feet, made sleep difficult that night, but there would be many worse nights in the future, whilst the thought that our long march across the dusty plateau of Tibet was over would have compensated for any discomfort. Now at last many plans were to be tested and many daydreams given a chance to materialise.

CHAPTER VIII

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THE SUN TOUCHED THE RIDGE OF MY TENT AT 7.15 next morning, April 18th, and a few minutes later the whole tent was bathed in its warm light. No slog in the teeth of a biting dust-laden wind had to be done that day; our way lay upwards now, till the summit was reached, if the gods were kind.

The weather was perfect; not a cloud showed and Everest was without its usual plume of wind-driven vapour. There was plenty for all to do, as a vast jumble of stores and equipment had to be checked and sorted out for the high camps. My job was to ascend to the site of Camp 1 and ascertain how much room was available for tents, there having been some difference of opinion over this between the old stagers Shebby and Ferdie.

I set off with Nima Tendrup and trudged across a waste of glacier-borne stones to the shelf formed by the east-side moraine of the Rongbuk glacier, a convenient route followed by previous expeditions which avoids a maze of moraines and ice.

Behind now were the dust-charged airs of the plateau; the atmosphere was crystal clear and the

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sun brilliant in an intensely blue sky, and only an occasional rush of cold air reminded us of more hostile altitudes.

As we progressed along the almost level shelf Everest slowly concealed itself behind the massive North Peak and peaks to the west of it were revealed, notably the shining ice-fluted ridges of Nupse and the graceful cone of Pumori. What a district for a mountaineering holiday were it not for the gaunt wind-swept pile of Everest to awaken different thoughts.

To set off this noble background, the Rongbuk glacier sweeps upwards in a serene curve broken in its middlemost portion by thousands of ice pinnacles arrayed like a march of giants solidified during a sortie from the heights.

About three miles from the Base Camp, the shelf peters out into boulder-strewn slopes. During the 1924 expedition, Captain Noel had managed to drive some mules to Camp 1, but the route was no longer possible for animals. Nima Tendrup had accompanied that expedition, but his memory of the route was vague and we kept too high round a corner, and had to descend several hundred feet to the camp site which is near the snout of the East Rongbuk glacier.

A dozen or more stone sangers (shelters) erected by the previous expeditions were still standing, and it was evident that a thousand men could camp there if need be. The glacier stream a few yards from the camp was frozen over, but some energetic work with the ice axe disclosed water and I had a refreshing drink. A cold west wind was blowing, but a sanger afforded protection and

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I spent a pleasant hour eating my lunch in the sun.

I had not finished when, chancing to glance upwards, my attention was caught by a tiny silvery object in the sky, apparently very high, moving rapidly from west to east. A second or two later it disappeared behind a shoulder of the range running southwards to the North Peak. Was it an aeroplane? If so, it must be a machine of the Houston-Everest Flight. But this was impossible; the last mail had brought us the news of their successful flight over the mountain. Was it a bird? But what bird could gleam so brightly?

It was pleasant to escape for once from the bustle of the expedition, and the afternoon was well advanced when Nima Tendrup and I strolled back to the Base Camp. There I related my experiences, but, in view of the fact that the first flight had been made, the others not unnaturally ridiculed the suggestion that I had seen an aeroplane.¹

Next day, April 19th, a party consisting of Shebbeare, Longland, Shipton, Birnie, Boustead, Wood-Johnson and Brocklebank, with a large number of our own porters and locally recruited Tibetans, all carrying heavy loads, established Camp 1. Meanwhile, Hugh and I worked hard at the stores. These were in boxes, coloured and marked for different camps, and it was merely

¹ A second flight was made on April 18th, and Lord Clydesdale afterwards told me that the machines had silver dope on the wings which would render them conspicuous at a great distance, especially in the clear Himalayan atmosphere. I cannot say the exact time that I saw the silvery object, but it must have been round about 11 a.m., though this is only a guess as I had no watch.

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a question of working out sufficient quantities for the first assault on the mountain. It looked very much as though difficulties were going to arise owing to the non-arrival of the porters, who had been sent for, from the Sola Khumbu Valley in Nepal, and it was possible that the pass they must cross into Tibet west of Everest was still blocked with winter snow.

In the afternoon we made a minute examination of the upper part of Everest through the astronomical telescope. The mountain was in splendid climbing order and since our arrival at the Base Camp had showed few signs of wind. It was always a fascinating occupation to examine it through a high-powered telescope, and one productive of much argument, yet, as we all realised, time alone could prove the truth or otherwise of our theories and assertions. As that great mountaineer, the late Captain J. P. Farrar, was wont to remark, "You can't tell what rocks are like until you've rubbed your nose against them."

The Camp 1 party returned in the afternoon. One of the porters, Ondi, had been taken ill during the ascent, but with indomitable pluck had continued to carry his load. Now he was in a state of collapse and came staggering slowly into camp helped by two of his comrades. He was immediately put to bed and within a very short time Raymond and Willy had diagnosed double pneumonia. Soon he relapsed into a coma and his one chance of survival depended on oxygen, for double pneumonia at an altitude of 16,800 feet must prove fatal unless oxygen can be administered.

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That evening, I visited him in his tent; he was still unconscious. It was probably the last time I should see him alive and I remembered him with gratitude and admiration for the work he had done on Kangchenjunga and Kamet. The little toy whistle fixed to the valve of the oxygen apparatus, so as to make the flow of oxygen audible, sounded peculiarly pathetic, almost as though his life were escaping from him in a thin wail.

Later, just before turning in, I watched Smidge and Tommy, who had been hard at work all day erecting their wireless installation, trying to get in touch with Richards at Darjeeling, but without success.¹

I woke at 4 a.m. Ondi's oxygen cylinder was being changed by the doctors and I heard Raymond tell Hugh that he was living but that his temperature was 104. At 7.30, when I got up, he was still alive, even better.

The condition of Ferdie was now causing anxiety. At such an altitude, there seemed little chance of recovery from his lung trouble, so it was decided to send him down with Ondi to the Kharta Valley for two or three weeks. It was a terrible disappointment for him, and we were all very sorry for his bad luck. If any expedition needed a professional "life and soul" he would fill the bill admirably. He was his usual cheerful self when he rode off on a pony. One danger of high altitudes is that once a man becomes seriously ill he is unlikely to recover unless he is sent down

¹ We heard afterwards that the Darjeeling station had been put out of action by lightning.

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to a lower level. Everest is no mountain for invalids.

Wyn was still ill with influenza, but, fortunately, it was not considered necessary to send him down. At the same time, it was unlikely that he would be strong enough for work on the mountain for some time.

On April 21st, Shipton, Longland, Birnie, Boustead, Wood-Johnson and I went up to occupy Camp 1. Eric and I started in advance of the others. We went deliberately slowly to avoid rapid breathing through the mouth, as Eric had a sore throat and an altitude cough, but we took only two hours to walk about four miles and climb 900 feet, Camp 1 being 17,700 feet.

It had been arranged originally that all six should sleep in one of the arctic tents, but when this was pitched we saw that it meant a crush, so Eric and I erected two small Meade tents and ensconced ourselves therein. These were tents of the same pattern that had proved so good on Kamet, homely, companionable little tents, yet capable of withstanding the worst weather.

We had not camped long before choughs appeared on the look-out for scraps. They were quite tame and hopped about the camp eyeing us inquisitively, as though well aware that no animal life must be taken in the sacred Rongbuk valley.

The intensely dry air and hot sun were already ravaging our countenances. My lower lip had cracked so badly that I was careful to avoid hot condiments and foods. My beard, always a laggard, was coming on, but I was not yet accustomed to the feel of it, and vowed I would shave

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it off at the earliest opportunity. A beard, of course, is an admirable protection against sunburn.

During the afternoon the weather threatened snow, but the clouds broke up later and the evening was calm. Increased height, coupled with the necessity for breathing through the mouth, had aggravated sore throats, whilst some were not yet well acclimatised; Jack, in particular, had a pulse of 130 when he arrived in camp and was breathing jerkily. In the end only George and Hugo slept in the arctic tent, the others preferring Meades.

It was not until we unpacked the first of the glacier camp ration boxes that we discovered that instead of four pounds of sugar in each box there were only four ounces of this precious substance. This was a dreadful discovery, but it was in part compensated for by the number of sugary foods. Many and terrible were the curses hurled at the firm responsible for the packing, but it was really the expedition's fault for not having supervised it. There was considerable grumbling also over the quality of the jam and sweets, and we found that the cheapest quality of Messrs. Crosse & Blackwell's jam, intended only for the porters, was preferable to that supplied by another firm to the Europeans.

My heart and lungs might be acclimatised to 17,700 feet, but not so my digestion. We had curry for dinner and it gave me hell. As I lay uncomfortably awake I remembered a notice I had once seen reproduced. It ran something like this: "A grand potato-pie feast will be held for

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the brethren in the parish hall, after which Father O'Reilly will address the brethren, the subject being 'A Night in Hell.' "

The threatened storm broke during the night, and a fierce wind roared down on the camp, smiting our little tents. At 6 a.m., when I looked out, the sun was shining weakly, but an hour later the sky had clouded over. Then came a deep, long-drawn-out boom which I thought must be an avalanche, followed a few seconds later by another boom. It was thunder, an unusual occurrence on Everest. The storm lasted two hours, and seemed to concentrate on the range running south to the North Peak and on Everest itself. Later the wind dropped, and snow fell heavily.

I had never previously seen a thunderstorm at such an altitude and it would be interesting to know how far the thunderclouds extended up Everest. Before the monsoon, thunderstorms are usually confined to the warmer valleys south of the Himalayan watershed. The weather was in a surly combative mood, and it was impossible not to feel that Everest resented our coming and was giving loud tongue to that resentment. At all times a thunderstorm among high mountains is impressive, and even at this altitude where the thin atmosphere tends to deaden sound, the great chorus of echoes that reverberated from peak to peak was indescribably magnificent.

Long after the thunder had ceased, snow continued to fall; possibly the storm preluded a spell of bad weather, as is often the case in the Alps.

In spite of the snowing under of his kitchen Lhakpa Chedi, who was acting-cook, came up to

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the scratch, and we breakfasted sumptuously on tea, porridge, fried ham and potatoes. Heavy snowfall is usually accompanied by passably warm conditions, but on this occasion it was so cold that when I cleaned my teeth the water in the tooth-mug froze in a few minutes. There was nothing to do except lie up for the day in our sleeping-bags and listen to the dismal patter of the snow on our tents. For part of this dull time I busied myself writing a little description of this, our first camp, on Everest.

"A few minutes ago, the weather looked like clearing; the snow had almost stopped and there was a fierce white glare that seemed to presage the sun. Now the snow has started again, pattering on the roof of my tent. Sometimes when a gust of wind catches it, it hisses across the Willesden canvas like a snake; at other times, when the wind drops, it treads lightly, like a crowd of small, inquisitive people.

"It is 11 a.m. In England, the early workers will be breakfasting, men will be stoking up factory fires, the electric trains will be humming through the suburbs of London.

"Now and again a gust of wind shakes the tent, and the accumulation of powdery snow trickles off it to add to a rising drift. Occasionally, around me, I hear my companions cough or stir in their sleeping-bags. By my side is my suitcase, and on it a miscellaneous collection of articles: a tin of throat pastilles, a pair of snow goggles, a pair of mitts, a candle-end, a knife, a map of Everest, a volume of 'Pickwick Papers,' a pocket Testament, and a leather case containing

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photographs of my family. Near the end of the tent rests my green kitbag, a hat, a scarf, and a light rucksack intended for high-altitude climbing. Over my double-layer, eiderdown sleeping-bag is laid my thick llama coat, which I have never ceased to bless since we began to experience the Tibetan wind. Under my pillow are wedged sundry articles of clothing; it is easier to sleep at a height with the head high.

"I am clothed in a pair of woollen combinations, a Shetland body-belt, two pairs of Shetland pants, three Shetland pullovers, and a camel-hair sweater. On my head is a woollen Balaclava helmet; the warmth of it round my ears and neck is most comforting. The tent is getting dark owing to the accumulation of snow. I bang the sides and the snow slithers off. How long will it continue to fall? Should the snowstorm develop into a severe blizzard and make life too uncomfortable in our Meade tents, we have always the arctic tent, the same pattern of tent in which Courtauld spent so many months on the plateau of Greenland.

"Still the snow falls, too regularly to hope for an early clearance. I have plenty of books to read, and 'Punch' and the 'Passing Show' arrived by runner only yesterday. How queer the little suburban jokes and tittle-tattle about actors and film stars seem here.

"Why are we lying here, when we might be eating and drinking in comfort at sea-level? Yet, for some curious reason, I would not exchange the discomfort of Everest for the comfort of sea-level. We curse our luck, we curse the discomfort,

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but we go on with it. Why? I wish I knew. My hands are ingrained with dirt, my face sun-scorched and sore, my cracked lips painful. 'Why do you do it?' How can we explain when we don't know? And we don't care whether or not we are understood—not a bit. We only know that in discomfort, in storm, in the beauty and grandeur of the mountains we have discovered something very much worth while."

The snow ceased falling in the afternoon and the sun showed through a thin mist. But the weather was still unsettled, and when night came the stars shone dimly. Dinner consisted of thick pea soup and Irish stew: a good meal, yet few of us slept well; I did not doze off until after 3 a.m.

April 23rd dawned mistily. Snow lay several inches deep and the scene was bleak and wintry. Further inactivity was distasteful and Hugo, George, and I decided to ascend the East Rongbuk glacier towards the site of Camp 2. The new snow was deep enough to form bridges between the boulders of the side moraine of the glacier and we were continually breaking through and barking our shins. In such conditions rhythm was impossible and we jumped from boulder to boulder like paralytic cats, frequently sinking knee-deep into concealed ankle-twisting holes.

Presently we came level with the lowermost of the great ice pinnacles that are a feature of the glaciers in this region. How they are formed is still a matter for speculation among glacierologists, and there is nothing resembling them in the Alps. There are thousands of pinnacles of an average height of about 50 feet, some as high as 80 feet.

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Unlike the square-cut séracs of the Alps they are mostly tapering, some being amazingly beautiful and ending in crests of extraordinary fragility and delicacy. Here and there stones are embedded, but for the most part they are pure ice of a cold translucent green to which the deep blue of the sky contributes its own subtle tinge. To pass between their ranks is a fitting introduction to the highest mountain of the world, and he is unimaginative indeed who cannot feel the spell of this strange land.

We ascended the true left-hand moraine, until a small glacier debouching from the west forced us on to a medial moraine which we reached by a simple but fatiguing traverse. The snow became steadily worse as we trudged along this, and a pitiless, nearly vertical sun resolved the landscape into a scorching, glaring expanse. Nothing was to be gained by exhausting ourselves and, at a point about a mile from the camp site, we decided to return; we had been going for about three hours. Finding a place more or less sheltered from the wind, which was beginning to blow venomously up the glacier, we lunched off sardines, biscuits, condensed milk and honey, concluding with a snowball treated with condensed milk, a passable imitation of a custard ice. We were tired, and my legs were like leaden weights, but as we descended we gradually regained strength and were once again able to interest ourselves in our surroundings, an interest too easily lost in the slogging work of mountaineering at high altitudes. We could even muster sufficient mental energy to want to climb the fine peak

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north-west of the glacier, named by a previous expedition "Kellas's Dark Rock Peak,"¹ which was subsequently to appear in the illustrated press on numerous occasions as "Everest."

On returning to Camp 1, we found Raymond and Tom, who had come up from the Base Camp accompanied by Policey. They told us that Wagers had been forced to remain there owing to stomach trouble. More welcome news was that Wyn was recovering from his chill and should be able to join us in a few days. Willy had accompanied Ondi, who was still very ill, as far as Rongbuk. On the way both sides of the stretcher had broken, and the sick man had fallen heavily to the ground. Raymond had some things to say about the manufacturer of this stretcher which I wish that gentleman could have heard. Incidentally, we were finding cases of food and equipment wrongly marked, and checking them made for a considerable amount of unnecessary work, which was doubly trying in the cold wind. The packing also in many cases did not correspond with the store book, and, to make matters worse, we found that some of our luxuries, including all the crystallised fruit, had been stolen, no doubt during the marches between Tengye Dzong and Shekar Dzong. The boxes had been so skilfully opened and closed that scarcely a trace of the tampering was to be seen, whilst to make up weight, stones had been substituted. It was infuriating to know that for many days porters and animals had been carrying boxes containing little beyond geological

¹ This peak, 23,180 feet high, was climbed by Shipton's party in 1935.

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specimens from the districts where the thefts had taken place.

Wireless communication with Darjeeling had not yet been established, although Smidge and Tommy were working hard at the problem. It seemed strange that they should fail to get into touch with Darjeeling when they were able to receive the B.B.C. short-wave Empire broadcasts.

For supper that evening we had pea soup, baked beans and a little meat. Waggers had given me two thermometers to record maximum and minimum temperatures above the Base Camp, and the minimum recorded in my tent that night with the thermometer, which I forgot to put outside, only a foot from my body was 10° F. Yet, it felt a warm night; possibly we were becoming inured to cold.

I slept better, but lay awake for two hours, belching in a horrible manner, so too did others, judging from sounds from other tents, whilst often someone would have a coughing fit. Sore throats, coughs and "tummy troubles" are tremendous hindrances to climbing at high altitudes. The foul dust we had breathed for weeks on the march, combined with the cold, dry air and the necessity for breathing quickly through the mouth, had wreaked havoc on the membranes of our throats. To climb Everest we should have to rise superior to the many physical disadvantages of high altitudes.

CHAPTER IX

CAMP TWO

WE WERE GLAD OF A REST DAY FOLLOWING OUR reconnaissance towards Camp 2. Next morning, April 24th, the sun was shining from an unclouded sky. The minimum overnight temperature was -1° F. We did not turn out until 10, when we decided to complete the route to the site of Camp 2.

Raymond and I started first and were followed by Eric, George and Tom. Walking was easier now that sun and frost had consolidated the snow; also we were better acclimatised. We reached our previous highest point in two hours; beyond this there was some heavy slogging through softer snow and we began to feel the altitude, not as a headache, but as an increasing tiredness and weakness in the legs. We were not sure as to the exact position of the camp site and as a result went too far up the glacier. Actually it was at the junction of a side glacier with the main glacier, on a slope of scree and ice beside a frozen glacier lake hemmed about on three sides by ice pinnacles. It was a weirdly beautiful place; the

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smooth snow-covered surface of the frozen lake might have been a dance floor for the mountain elves, and the ice pinnacles, slender and gleaming against the intensely blue sky, watch-towers to guard their revelries against intrusion. It was strange to think that the reeking chimney stacks of Lancashire and these shining spires of virgin ice were part and parcel of the same earth.

We were tired, a tiredness due primarily to sun and altitude, but once again our strength returned as we descended. We regained Camp 1 as the golden sunlight was relinquishing the peaks.

The temperature fell to -3° F. in the night, but owing to a strenuous day and improving acclimatisation I slept well and did not wake until the sun was up.

That day, April 26th, Eric, George, Hugo and I with twenty Tibetan porters and four Sherpas, including Lhakpa Chedi, who was to cook for us, set off to establish Camp 2. Most of the snow, fallen during the previous storm, had melted and walking was comparatively easy. We improved on the previous day's route and for some distance followed the sharp crest of a medial moraine. The Tibetans were in good spirits and laughed and chattered gaily, apparently impervious to the effects of altitude in spite of their heavy loads. They included a woman who carried a load fully as heavy as any carried by the men; she seemed to enjoy it and her broad, smoke-begrimed face was one continual grin. These Tibetans seemed tireless, but it was noticeable that, although a mountain people, they had not acquired that slow, unhurrying labour-saving pace so necessary in

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mountaineering. Their method was to hurry along for a short distance, then rest, but it is possible that their heavy loads, and the fact that they placed the greater part of the weight on their foreheads by means of a tump-band, had something to do with this.

On arriving at the camping site, Eric and I cut a hole into the frozen lake until the pure, cold water bubbled up through the ice. The camp was well sheltered from the wind, but conditions were wintry, and when at 4.15 p.m. the sun disappeared behind the 22,000 feet peak west of the camp, the thermometer fell to 10° F. in a few minutes. The sun alone makes life possible at these altitudes. When there is no wind it is possible to bask thinly clad in its rays, but directly it disappears the cold from outer space seems to pour down on the earth. One moment we were strolling about warm and comfortable, the next we were wriggling into our sleeping-bags.

The night was very cold and the temperature fell to -18° F. I slept little; I was warm enough, and could only blame the altitude for my insomnia. The hours, each longer and colder than the last, passed slowly. Once or twice I lit a candle and tried to read, but it was too cold, even with gloves on, to hold a book, and my hands soon lost sensation and I was forced to replace them in the sleeping-bag and restore circulation by rubbing them vigorously. There was dampness in the cold, and my breath congealed on the roof of the tent and on my sleeping-bag in a thick rime.

Presently it was necessary to leave my tent. Extricating myself by slow degrees from the cling-

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ing folds of my sleeping-bag, I huddled on my heavy llama wool coat, pulled on my camp boots, fumbled with cold fingers at the tapes closing the flaps of the tent and crawled outside. Among the pale, ghostly séracs beneath a myriad shivering stars an intense stillness reigned, broken occasionally by the pistol-like reports of splitting ice, and dull, tearing wrenches from the depths of the glacier.

Shuddering, I returned to my tent and with stiff fingers laced together the flaps and crept into my sleeping-bag, where I spent the next quarter of an hour massaging the circulation back into my hands.

When I awoke next morning, April 27th, the camp was quite silent; no one would rise until the sun arrived. And the sun was a long time arriving. Through the gauze-covered window of the tent I could see it shining brilliantly on the slopes above. It reached the ice pinnacles and a reflected opalescent glow invested the camp. Then a brilliant light was suddenly spilled on the ridge of my tent. Quickly it spread downwards, and the frost-stiffened fabric gleamed as though encrusted with powdered jewels. Soon the whole of one side of the tent was alight, and particles of rime began to fall from the roof, pattering on my frost-stiffened sleeping-bag, lodging in my beard, exploring my face like cold finger-tips.

The snow creaked to a footfall outside, a hand fumbled at the lacing of the tent, the tent flaps parted, and there was old Nima Tendrup, a grin on his face and a plateful of steaming porridge in one hand. How it went down, that porridge! I

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could feel the warmth of it spreading through my whole body, percolating to every toe and fingertip, the embodiment of life and energy.

It was a rest day; we were to remain at Camp 2 for a period to acclimatise and there was no object as yet in pushing on up the glacier. After breakfast Hugo and I climbed a slope of scree and snow behind the camp until we had a bird's-eye view of the East Rongbuk glacier. Conditions were still very wintry, and powdery snow lay deeply in the hollows between the séracs. Above the level of the camp were thousands of séracs arranged in regular lines; then the glacier bent in a great S-shaped curve and disappeared between the east ridge of Everest and the square, blunt mass of the North Peak. Camp 3 was to be pitched on the last bend of the curve, a shelterless site and so exposed to north-westerly blizzards that the 1924 party was forced to retreat to the Base Camp. Perhaps with our arctic tents we should manage to weather the worst Everest might have in store for us there and at Camp 4 on the North Col. To-day, with a clear sky, except for a diaphanous mist floating lazily from the summit ridge of Everest, the tale of storm and blizzard seemed remote.

Along the centre of the glacier runs a moraine forming a deeply cut channel or trough; up this trough former expeditions had passed, and the only problem was to discover the easiest route to it from Camp 2. Between it and the camp was another and less continuous trough, and it seemed best to follow this for some distance then traverse the glacier where it was least broken. We knew

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that once in the main trough we were unlikely to meet with difficulties unless it had changed materially since 1924; it would lead us through the tangle of séracs to the upper plateau of the glacier.

We descended to camp in time to join Eric and George at a lunch consisting of frozen turkey galantine and queer little balls of a doughy substance pronounced a great delicacy by Lhakpa Chedi, but which I for one found uneatable.

In the afternoon Rutledge, Greene, Birnie, Brocklebank and Longland arrived. Tom had a slight chill whilst Jack was still unacclimatised to altitude; however, as I told him as he lay in his tent feeling pretty sorry for himself, he was probably another Odell.¹ Hugh, who was remarkably fit, said that Wyn and Waggers had recovered and were shortly coming up from the Base Camp to Camp 1. Shebby, after some stomach trouble, was also better and was at Camp 1 where nearly all our stores and equipment were now assembled. The "Bijli Wallahs" (Wireless Officers) were not yet in touch with Darjeeling and were experimenting with every conceivable combination of aerial and apparatus.

There was an argument that evening as to our dinner hour. Some wanted it early and others late. Early was taken to mean 4 p.m. and late 6 p.m. The cook and his assistants had to be considered, as the cold after sundown made it difficult to wash up. A compromise of 5 p.m. was finally agreed upon, with a hot drink in our sleeping-bags at six.

¹ N. E. Odell, after acclimatising very slowly in 1924, put up a remarkable performance on Everest.

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The sun disappeared at 4.15. The fall of temperature as it did so was extraordinary. At 4.10 the temperature in my tent was 65° F.; at 4.20 it was 20° F. and at 4.30 7° F.

There was another intensely cold night with the same disagreeable frosting-over of sleeping-bags and tents, and the minimum temperature was -16° F. Perhaps 48° of frost does not sound much, but on Everest low temperatures are only half the story; the lack of oxygen must also be taken into account. Oxygen is fuel to the human body and without sufficient of it the body cannot maintain its warmth.¹ The most noticeable effect of oxygen lack at high altitudes is a quick loss of circulation in the extremities. Expose bare hands *outside a sleeping-bag* when the temperature is round about zero and numbness supervenes in a minute or two. And once lost, circulation is difficult to restore; prolonged and vigorous rubbing is necessary and the process is painful.

The weather was uncertain next morning, April 28th; the sky was half-filled with high clouds moving quickly from the west and a smother of snow was tearing across Everest. Hugh decided that George, Hugo and I should reconnoitre the glacier towards Camp 3. We left camp soon after eight and, following the first medial moraine, made rapid progress. The moraine appeared continuous, though snow concealed it

¹ It has been pointed out by scientists that somewhere near the summit of Everest, it is hoped *above* the summit, there is a critical altitude at which there is not sufficient oxygen to compensate for the loss of body heat due to breathing the intensely cold air. It is obvious that life cannot continue in such conditions.

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here and there, yet in one place there was a snow-masked hole, it could hardly be called a crevasse, over which I stepped quite unaware of its existence. George, who was behind me, did not see it either, but accidentally put his ice axe through the snow bridge. I had stepped unwittingly across a perfect death-trap. It was only 2 or 3 feet wide at the top, but it was bottle-shaped below and at least 100 feet deep to judge from the hollow sound of the stones we threw into it. After this we roped and, turning left from the moraine, and crossing a crevasse by a substantial snow bridge, passed between some minor séracs on to the uneven surface of the glacier. Here powdery snow lay deeply, concealing holes between slippery hummocks of ice. At first I led, and every time I floundered hip deep into an apparent crevasse, George yanked me backwards on the rope, as nonchalantly as a fisherman lands a sprat. So good did he prove at this that he was relegated permanently to second place whilst Hugo and I took turns at the track-making.

Presently we crossed a minor trough in the glacier and, climbing a bank of glassy ice saw, framed between some ice pinnacles, a wide corridor thrusting its way up the glacier as far as we could see. This was the central trough, and our route towards Camp 3. Threading our way between the pinnacles we descended into it without difficulty. Its floor was composed of scree alternating with soft, deep snow and progress was wearisome in the extreme. Furthermore, the sun was reflected from the pinnacles on either hand in a hot glare and we were soon troubled by the

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lassitude so often experienced by former Everest climbers, a mental and physical lethargy undermining all interest and determination. Had it not been for this we might have appreciated the beauty of this strange road, leading fairy-like through an enchanted forest of gleaming pinacles.

We continued for another hour, then decided that further progress was unnecessary; the route was obvious enough, and it remained only to follow it.

A cool breeze was blowing up the trough as we descended, but on the snow-covered glacier there was such an airless blinding glare that our energy drained away like liquid through a funnel, and we were thankful to regain Camp 2.

Porters carrying more food and equipment, including an arctic tent, had arrived from Camp 1. They had also brought with them Polacey, who was noticeably feeling the altitude and panting rapidly; we could only hope that she would not have enough breath left for barking all night.

An arctic tent was pitched and we dined comfortably. As usual I slept none too well. At high altitudes a man breathes mostly through the mouth. This in my case used to result in an uncomfortable ring of ice round the neck of my sleeping-bag, and on one occasion I woke, after a particularly vivid dream, under the impression that I was a small boy again and had just been kissed by one of my aunts.

Snow fell lightly in the night, but the weather was fine next morning and it soon melted and evaporated. I breakfasted in my sleeping-bag

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and remained in my tent writing letters until lunch-time. Meanwhile Greene, Shipton, Birnie and Longland continued with the work of making the route to Camp 3.

During the day some porters arrived from Camp 1 in response to a note sent down by Hugh. It had been planned that they should spend a rest day at Camp 2, then go through with their loads to Camp 3, but, unfortunately, they brought up a number of unwanted oxygen cylinders instead of fuel. Fuel was of paramount importance, and its non-arrival delayed our start for a day. I had no objection to a rest day and lounged about in the sun listening to the vexed discussions of those whose job was to get up enough stores and equipment, so that we wretched climbers could assail Everest.

The latest news from below was that Wager, although at Camp 1, was still none too fit and that wireless communication had not yet been established between the Base Camp and Darjeeling. Apparently the mountains were blocking reception both ways. From all accounts the unfortunate Smijth-Windham and Thompson were almost in despair and were experimenting with every conceivable site for their aerial. Such was the first message, but a second, brought up by a porter only a few minutes later, said that communication had been established and that signals were at full strength. One problem at least was solved, but I suspect that Hugh hardly welcomed this news, as it meant he would now have to send telegrams to the newspapers.

Raymond and Jack of the Camp 3 party were

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back early, but Eric and Bill did not return till supper-time, when their absence was beginning to cause anxiety. In spite of soft snow in the upper part of the trough, they had got within a quarter of a mile of the camp site and had seen the North Col. There was nothing now to stop us from establishing Camp 3, and one immediate result of this good news was a cheerful company at supper in the arctic tent and a long tiger story from George, which was suitably capped with a jorum of hot rum punch.

Next morning, April 30th, Hugh decided that George, Hugo and I should go through to the site of Camp 3, thereby completing the route for the porters, and examine the North Col through a telescope. We took with us two porters, Nima Dorje, the brother of an assistant cook, and Kitar, Hugh's servant. Because he was the Burra Sahib's servant the latter was suffering from a swelled head, and had to be severely reprimanded more than once for disobeying orders.

There was now a well-trodden route up the glacier and we reached our previous highest point in half the time it had taken originally. Thenceforward we continued up the trough over stones and snow, then continuous snow, following the tracks of Eric and Bill. Higher up is a devil's garden of fantastic growths and profiles of gleaming ice; as though some Gothic designer had applied surrealism to an unusually vivid imagination yet never lost sight of beauty in his most extravagant constructions. Almost imperceptibly the trough peters out in the gently sloping uppermost reaches of the glacier. Here the ice pinnacles

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are evolved from the smooth surface of the glacier. To begin with they are mere nodules and low hummocks, then, as the glacier carries them down, they attain individuality and gain in height to become finally the noble structures with which we were familiar. Wind, evaporation, a great range of temperature and the movement of the glacier all play their part in shaping them, but it is a significant fact that they are only found in exceptionally dry climates and are not seen in districts where moister conditions prevail.

Wind had drastically denuded the glacier of snow, and we found ice of glassy hardness, indeed some of the hardest and most slippery ice I have trodden; it was here that several porters hurt themselves in 1922 and 1924. Nevertheless, we progressed fairly rapidly, aided here and there by patches of snow.

Presently we halted for some lunch. As we ate, the weather quickly deteriorated; a smooth, grey, fish-like cloud slid out of the west concealing Everest, and a strong wind rushed down the glacier, tearing up the loose snow and flinging it about in sheets.

We continued as quickly as we could, presently roping as a precaution against stray crevasses, but clouds gathered quickly, the sun weakened, shrivelled to a faintly glowing ball and vanished, and light, shadow and colour united in a single doleful monotone. The site of Camp 3 was obvious enough, but we should see nothing of the North Col if we reached it; there was no object in going farther, and we retired to Camp 2 in drizzling snow.

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Towards evening the angry sky relented and, with an abruptness characteristic of high mountains, the clouds melted away, disclosing a colourful sunset. The stage was now set for the next act, the establishing of Camp 3 and the forcing of the route to the North Col. Mountaineering at last; an inspiring thought.

CHAPTER X

CAMP THREE

MAY 1ST. I WOKE WITH A FEELING THAT THIS month would see the issue decided. The weather had regained its good humour and I spent the morning in my sun-warmed tent reading and writing. Some more porters arrived to help establish Camp 3, which Shipton, Birnie, Longland, Boustead, Wood-Johnson and I were to occupy on the morrow. Except for some very cold nights we had been moderately comfortable at Camp 2; discomfort on Everest begins at Camp 3. It would be good to be on the move again. Inactivity is worse than discomfort to a mountaineer, especially on Everest. The big task before us was never far from our minds, and it aggravated an impatience arising from the slow advance believed to be necessary for acclimatisation and the consolidation of camps with ample food and fuel. This slow progress was part of a prearranged scheme; the question is should a future expedition gain its acclimatisation on other mountains before reaching the Base Camp? If it did it would be spared much boredom, discomfort and deferred hope.

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There was the summit not very far away, and we must wait and wait, and Everest is not a good mountain for a waiting game. Life at high altitudes is doubly trying to a civilised man. He ceases to appreciate beauty and becomes more and more crude in his thoughts and habits. He thinks for the most part of his comfort and of food and drink. He is a prey to a mental as well as a physical lethargy and gazes apathetically at scenes which he would be quick to understand and appreciate at lower levels.

During the day I washed for the first time since leaving the Base Camp and cut my finger-nails, which were curiously dry and brittle. Much dirt was ingrained in my hands and only long scrubbing removed it. My moustache was long and straggled into anything I drank. I loathed the feel of it, and the feel of my beard, but both protected me a little from sunburn.

The sky clouded over in the afternoon and snow fell. During the snowstorm, which was not a heavy one, the dak runner arrived with letters from home. We grabbed our mail and retired to our tents like dogs to their kennels with succulent morsels. There was also a batch of newspapers, but their most startling headlines roused little interest: wars, revolutions, cabinet crises and the like—a cursory glance, nothing more; we were too concerned with our own small affairs, our own world of snow, rocks and weather. Were we parochial or did we look down like Olympian gods on the incredible follies of a far-distant world? Yet, this world ever reminded us of its manifold activities: clothing, boots, food, ropes, tents; its

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products were there to help us to the top of Everest.

Wyn and Wagers arrived during the day and we were glad to notice how much fitter they looked. Later it stopped snowing and the sun set frostily in a green sky. After supper, Nima Tendrup brought me a hot-water bottle, and with this warming my feet I told myself it was better to be a Sybarite and comfortable than a Spartan and uncomfortable. Life is too short not to make ourselves as comfortable as we can; there will be discomfort enough for some of us in the next world. Yet, in spite of this luxury I had a very bad night as something I had eaten died a lingering and agonising death within me. I did not sleep until 5 a.m., and was awakened at 6.30 by Hugh, who turned out in the bitter cold to hand over various items destined for Camp 3, including diaries in which meteorological notes were to be recorded. No leader ever rose earlier than he.

Feeling ill and disinclined to face the long slog to Camp 3, I somehow packed my gear and set off with Eric in advance of the porters. For the first mile or so I could scarcely drag one leg after the other, then the pain in my stomach gradually dissipated itself in a feeling of sickness which, in its turn, disappeared.

The weather was good for three-quarters of the way, then degenerated into a desultory snow-storm. After nearly four hours we turned a corner beneath the crags of the North Peak and reached a side moraine where there was evidence of the Camp 3 of previous expeditions in the shape of old tins and expended oxygen cylinders. These

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last, we decided, would make excellent dinner gongs.

Nothing can exceed the efficiency of Sherpa porters when a camping site is reached. Within a few minutes they fashion a number of level platforms and erect the tents, which at once transform the stoniest waste into something sociable and homelike.

From the camp, the north-east face of Everest was in full view. The mountain is not at its best from this direction. Much of the upper part of the north-east ridge is concealed behind the north ridge, whilst the final pyramid, although nearly 1,000 feet high, appears squat and ineffective, and it is impossible to estimate the width of the mountainside between it and the north ridge.

The sun left the camp at 3.15 p.m., earlier than we had expected. As usual at the approach of night the snow ceased falling and the clouds quickly melted away, exposing the world to an intense cold, which seemed almost to flow down like some deadly liquid from the uttermost depths of space. Before turning in I walked out on to the glacier until the North Col was in full view. I had memorised photographs of it taken in 1924, and it was at once evident that the slopes had changed considerably during the past nine years. The ice chimney climbed by Mallory in 1924 had disappeared, whilst access to the Col via the easy but dangerous central route, the scene of the 1922 avalanche, was intersected horizontally by a formidable-looking ice cliff. The most conspicuous feature was an outward-sloping shelf, slanting from low right to high left across the face of the

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Col. In bad snow conditions it would be exposed to avalanches, particularly in its lowermost portion, but there was ice there now; I could see its dull, lustreless gleam. Perhaps the best route to the shelf was the 1922 route, if the ice cliff could be climbed. Once gained, it should be possible to discover a moderately easy route to the crest of the Col.

We dined at 4 p.m. and afterwards had a hot drink in our sleeping-bags. I slept well until midnight, when the usual ice forming round the neck of my sleeping-bag, plus a rather sore throat, woke me. Snow was beginning to fall; I could hear the light swish of it on my tent.

I slept on and off until seven, when Nima Tendrup brought me my breakfast of porridge, tea, fried ham and biscuits. When I looked out of my tent I was astonished to see a mound of snow suddenly burst asunder, disclosing Policy busily wagging her tail and not one whit the worse for her temporary burial. She preferred to sleep in the open, and invariably refused the shelter of a tent.

The wind rose later and by sundown had reached gale force. This was our first taste of really bad weather. The little tents flapped wildly in the snow-charged gusts, but the porters had pitched them well and had tied the guy-ropes to large boulders and piled more boulders on the outside flaps.

The storm increased steadily during the night, and by midnight a hurricane was raging. I found sleep impossible until the small hours owing to dust-like snow infiltrating through the ventilator of my Meade tent and, as I noticed with consider-

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able disquiet, through the tent fabric itself. This last was very serious. If our tents were not snow-proof at Camp 3, how would they behave 6,000 feet higher where complete shelter and maximum comfort were vitally necessary? Fortunately we had some tents made of the same cloth as that of our windproof suits which so far had proved thoroughly satisfactory.

The worst nights pass. The wind dropped; dawn came and with it the sun. It was a fair morning, apart from smooth-looking reticulated clouds, lying in long regular lines from east to west, a portent of evil weather, confirmed by a low reading of the Watkins aneroid barometer. Some porters with more equipment, including arctic tents, from Camp 2, were expected, but they did not arrive; probably there was too much new snow in the trough and on the glacier.

We were tired of inactivity, and decided to reconnoitre the North Col. An easy but laborious side moraine led us up for about 800 feet to the upper plateau of the glacier. The wind had blown this almost completely free of snow, exposing ice as slippery as a skating rink, and most of us came croppers. Only Eric seemed unaffected; I think he had on a pair of new boots, with Tricouni nails, but he is one of those people who adhere to any surface. Crampons would have been useful, but they conduct cold to the feet and their straps impede the circulation.

We unanimously decided to attack the central route to the North Col. This meant scaling the ice wall, already mentioned, and it looked a bad place for porters, but we remembered two rope

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ladders presented to the expedition by the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club. Once the wall had been climbed, one of these should suffice to consolidate the route.

In 1922 and 1924, Camp 4 had been pitched on a ledge only a few feet below the crest of the Col, but this no longer existed, and the only ledge we could see likely to prove wide enough for a camp was some 200 to 300 feet lower.

Before we could begin work on the slopes, Jack had to return to camp as he was not yet well acclimatised. This left Eric, Hugo and myself to carry on, and an hour and a half after leaving Camp 3 we arrived at the foot of the slopes, a superb curtain of snow and ice apparently suspended from the dark-blue sky. Beneath them we felt very weak and small, and the summit of Everest was 7,000 feet higher—7,000 feet still to go.

Our way to begin with lay up a broad gully between two breasts of ice, a safe enough introduction as a slip or an avalanche could not carry a party over an ice wall or into a crevasse. The snow proved unexpectedly hard and wind-blown, and every step had to be kicked. We took it in turns to lead, and after an hour and a half had gained perhaps 400 feet of height. Fixed ropes were unnecessary on this first section, but above it they would be essential for the porters.

We felt little wind, but higher the snow was being driven across the north face of Everest in great clouds which writhed far away from the mountain, vanishing like steam in the dark-blue sky.

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The slope steepened gradually, and presently we were step-cutting in icy snow. It was hard work and, as we were merely reconnoitring and had no wish to tire ourselves at such an early stage of our acclimatisation, we decided to return.

Mists gathered during the descent and we reached camp in falling snow. No one had come up from Camp 2, so George and Nima Tendrup descended that evening to find out what was happening there. The possibility of the monsoon arriving early was never far from our minds, and we felt that the sooner we got on with the job the better. One thing likely to delay us was that Camp 4 was to be occupied by the whole climbing party. This was accounted necessary in order that everyone should be acclimatised as soon as possible, but it would make portorage difficult and might delay the assault on the summit. Six climbers on the North Col should be ample: two for one attempt, two for another attempt, to act also as a support party at Camp 5, and two in permanent support at Camp 4.

It was a dull evening with a grey roof of clouds. We dined in the porters' tent pleasantly warmed by two Primus stoves. Pasang, the official cook, was suffering from altitude, but Lhakpa Chedi, who was full of energy, prepared a tasty meal.

That night I had a particularly vivid dream. My wife and mother had just sat down to dinner when I entered the dining-room in my climbing clothes and gave them an account of our doings. It was one of the clearest dreams I have ever had and without a single fantastic feature, and I shall

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never forget their looks of astonishment. It was as though space had been annihilated for a few instants.

Altogether I had my best sleep above the Base Camp, eleven hours, but others were not so lucky, and next morning some complained of being kept awake by a feeling of suffocation. Yet, there were never any grouses and at times I felt almost selfish for the quick, easy way in which I acclimatised. Acclimatisation is purely a matter of luck, and it must be heart-rending to a man, who is a first-rate mountaineer and longing to put up a good show, not to be able to go well at high altitudes.

May 5th dawned mistily, but presently the sun struggled through. The peaks were dusted with freshly fallen snow and Everest looked very forbidding in its livid mantle with a dull white cloud clinging hungrily to the summit.

I breakfasted luxuriously in my tent off porridge, fried ham and tea and afterwards read "Pickwick Papers," pausing now and then to anoint myself with face cream. My lips were now in a fair state of repair, thanks to frequent applications of cream, but my nose was very sore, particularly at the base of the nostrils, and I had picked my face and ears till blood came: there is nothing more difficult to resist than the craving to accelerate the departure of flaking skin.

During the day, Rutledge, Brocklebank, Greene and Wood-Johnson arrived from Camp 2 with a large body of porters, a heavy day's work as the snow had drifted deeply in the trough. The porters were in fine fettle, except for one grouser, my first cameraman and an "old soldier," Tsin

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Nurbu. It was important to keep an eye on grousers; pessimism has a knack of spreading rapidly on Everest.

A high wind rose at sunset and blew violently all night. Few slept owing to fine, powdery snow penetrating the tents, and my diary of May 6th begins laconically: "Another bloody day."¹

The morning sky was cloud-streaked with a plume of furious wind-driven snow on every peak, and a huge one raging from Everest. We had hoped to continue with the work on the North Col, but it was the windiest morning we had yet had and to start was manifestly impossible.

As the day progressed, the wind increased in violence. Making a great effort during a lull, we erected an arctic tent on a small frozen pond which formed a conveniently smooth floor. We did not expect Wager and Wyn Harris from Camp 2, but on the off-chance that they might brave the gale several of us struggled down the glacier through the snow-laden gusts. Once round the corner of the North Peak we escaped the worst of the wind and saw them coming up the glacier. Policy was with them; she had descended with George and was now returning eager for the fray. It was a tough pull for their porters over the last mile, but with heads down and emitting shrill whistles between their clenched teeth they struggled to the camp and dumped their loads with tired but satisfied grunts.

That night Bill, Eric, Raymond, Tom and I slept in the arctic tent. It was a great improve-

¹ See Preface.

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ment after a small Meade, but even so we woke in iced-up sleeping-bags cursing an unpleasant rain of snow, formed by our condensed breath, falling from the sun-warmed roof. The minimum temperature was -12° F. in the night.

CHAPTER XI

THE NORTH COL

THE 7TH OF MAY WAS ANOTHER DAY OF FOUL weather, and a high wind did its best to blow the camp away. How Policey survived such days and nights I cannot imagine. At 6.30 a.m. when I looked out of my tent she was almost a solid ball of snow and ice, but on seeing me her tail wagged, breaking loose from its icy bonds with an audible crack. In spite of the abominable weather, a day of complete inaction was not to be thought of, and Rutledge, Birnie, Shipton, Longland, Boustead and I, accompanied by Nima Tendrup and Pasang carrying ropes and wooden hollow-spar pitons, set off for the North Col slopes.

The wind on the glacier plateau beneath the Col had stripped the ice almost completely bare of snow and it was difficult to keep on our feet. From the crest of the North Col pennons of snow were streaming far upwards into the blue. And, higher still, Everest was the embodiment of elemental fury. It reeked and smoked like a volcano, and its yellow crags and slabs showed dimly through writhing clouds of snow rushing along at a speed of fully one hundred miles an hour.

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Long before we reached the foot of the Col it was evident that Pasang was not going well; he was stumbling on with a sort of grim determination painful to see. We divided his load between us and sent him back to camp. Old Nima Tendrup was, as usual, lumbering along with an apparently tireless gait, but he complained of cold feet and we noticed that he was not wearing his windproof suit. These porters are improvident fellows.

We had expected to find the slopes of the Col sheltered from the wind, but we were soon disillusioned. The wind poured rather than blew over the Col and the ridges of the North Peak and descended almost vertically into the glacier basin, whirling huge columns of snow before it. In places snow had been stripped from the face of the Col and a blue gleam here and there suggested some prolonged step-cutting before Camp 4 was pitched. At the same time, the steps we had made three days previously had vanished completely and would have to be re-made. Our original plan of establishing Camp 4 by May 10th did not seem likely to mature; in such conditions it would take three days at least to force the route and another day or two to stock the camp with provisions and equipment for the higher camps. It was even more doubtful whether all the climbing party would be able to live there as Hugh had planned, as owing to the non-arrival of the Sola-Khumbu men, we were short of porters.

The wind was too unpleasant for climbing on the slopes, and we dumped the ropes and pitons by a fallen ice block at the foot of them and returned to camp.

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During the evening the wind dropped and the weather showed signs of improving. The night was calm and it was a relief not to be constantly awakened by the thrumming and drumming of the tents.

The morning of May 8th was fine; only a slight fuzziness remained in the sky to remind us of yesterday's hurricane, and the Furies, worn out after days of continuous exertion, slept. Nevertheless, it was very cold, the minimum temperature in the night being -20° F.

Something we never properly appreciated was the work of the cooks. These unfortunate men were the recipients of much abuse, yet however bad the conditions they almost invariably produced a good breakfast. One advantage they had over us was the warmth of the cooking-stoves, and they would keep them going all night unless carefully rationed. Fuel is precious at 21,000 feet.

Before breakfast Lhakpa Chedi sliced a finger badly with a knife, and Raymond was called from his sleeping-bag to attend to him. The Sherpas and Bhotias are careless of wounds as a rule and appear to feel pain far less than a European. It is the prospect of injury rather than the injury that upsets them. Neither do they mind the nastiest medicines, and I have seen them swallow castor oil as if they liked it. Also they are careless of the cold and have not yet learnt to guard themselves properly against frostbite. Superstition and a cold wind are the two things that undermine their morale quickest.

With the exception of Tom, who was still able

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to enjoy smoking, there was not one of us now who had not an uncomfortably dry or sore throat. Some could only speak in husky whispers and many were racked by tearing coughs.

Hugh had decided overnight to send up a party of four, Eric, Raymond, Jack and myself, to pitch a camp on the glacier plateau near the foot of the North Col slopes, as this would obviate a fatiguing trudge up the moraine to the plateau, and economise the energy of the climbers, who were in for a tough piece of work on the slopes of the Col. This work was to be done in relays, and the first party who occupied this new camp, Camp 3a we called it, would be followed by a second party of four consisting of Wager, Wyn Harris, Birnie and Boustead.

The porters were in good form and Policey insisted on accompanying us, thus reaching a height of nearly 22,000 feet, surely a world's record for quadrupeds. She did not appear to mind the glacier in the least, and gaily leapt crevasses or floundered gallantly through patches of soft snow.

The glacier plateau was mostly bare ice, but there remained in one place an extensive and deep patch of wind-blown snow, of solid consistency that held tent pegs well. When we arrived, the sun, shining weakly through a deepening haze, was completely encircled by a halo; another blizzard was brewing.

The porters, together with Wyn and Wagers, who had accompanied us for exercise, returned to Camp 3, and we set about making ourselves as comfortable as possible. Eric appointed himself

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cook and a very good cook he proved. We had a Primus stove, and a fog of such density was created in the arctic tent that, as someone remarked, "you could cut it up into pieces and throw it outside."

After lunch we decided to continue with the work on the North Col and fix the first of the ropes. The snow was in better condition than before, and kicking and cutting steps, we made rapid progress to the foot of a steep slope leading up to a great crevasse.

It was after five when we decided to turn back. The sun had long since vanished and a deathly cold was creeping down the slopes. We drove in one of the long wooden pitons and attached a rope, then descended, putting in intermediate pitons *en route*, until the full length of the two hundred feet of rope was out, after which the lower end of the rope was attached to another piton.

Our work done, we descended rapidly to the lower slopes, where it was possible to glissade. Here Raymond came a nasty cropper. He was sliding down hard snow when suddenly his feet dug into a patch of soft snow and he took an awkward forward toss, twisting a stomach muscle. Finally, Jack, who, in spite of a high altitude cough had done a full share of the work, offered up his all at the foot of the slopes. He was feeling far worse than anyone, yet it was natural for him to be in the van of the attack.

It was snowing heavily when we arrived back in camp, but in spite of this we had a cheerful evening, except that our dinner was spoilt by some

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atrocious tinned veal. It was the worst tinned meat I have ever tasted and, for once, I think that not even fastidiousness due to altitude was to blame for our dislike; I can only compare it to a mass of jellified string. The remainder went down the nearest crevasse; it must have given the East Rongbuk glacier severe indigestion.

The arctic tent held four of us comfortably, and we slept with our feet towards the centre like spokes of a wheel.

Snow fell heavily all night, but we were warm and moderately comfortable, although the snow beneath the tent did not form such a soft bed as might be supposed, and became lumpy and uneven, due to the weight and warmth of our bodies.

It was still falling when May 9th dawned. Four to six inches had already come down and the weather seemed likely to double that quantity. Things looked black. It might be a long time now before we reached the North Col, as a heavy fall of snow would make the slopes impracticable owing to the danger of avalanches. There was nothing to be done except to hope for the best. Our remarks on the weather were terse and bitter. Luck was dead against us; neither in 1922 nor 1924 had such continuously bad weather been experienced. The only kick I got out of it was chaffing Raymond, who had decided to stop at the camp in spite of his damaged stomach muscle. Before starting on the Kamet Expedition he said that he always brought good weather, and on that expedition he certainly had, but Everest had defeated him. Fortunately there was not much

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wind, except for an occasional gust, but it was tedious lying in our sleeping-bags listening to the snow hissing down the sides of the tent.

Meals took a long time to prepare. Once the "Primus" ran short of fuel, and when I went out to get some more paraffin I had difficulty in finding the tin as it had been buried by snow. When at length I re-entered the tent, plastered with snow from head to foot, the others laughingly called me Captain Oates. Indeed, the scene outside might have been transported from the Beardmore glacier. Nothing was visible save our solitary blister-like tent, looming fantastically through the driving snow, and the morning was as dark as an English November day.

We took turns at the miserable business of "washing up," which consisted of rubbing the plates and other utensils with snow, and at obtaining supplies of ice for cooking purposes. To get this last it was necessary to go some distance from the camp and shovel away the freshly fallen snow until the glacier was bared.

Lunch consisted of a galantine of chicken and veal frozen solid, a hot drink, biscuits and butter; then, once more, we settled down in our sleeping-bags for the long afternoon and evening. The time was partly killed by a discussion on mountaineering ethics, whilst in the interludes would come in a hoarse whisper from Eric, "Oh, for a few dozen eggs!" Yes, we would have given much for fresh eggs, as already we were heartily tired of tinned food. It lacked the vital quality of fresh food; there was something dead about it.

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Early in the afternoon there was a temporary weather clearance, but soon it was snowing again. At 3 p.m. we were surprised to hear voices. Wyn and Wagers, with Bill in charge of the transport, had arrived from Camp 3, bringing with them another arctic tent.

The day ended dismally, and snow was falling heavily as we cooked our supper. At seven we drew our sleeping-bags over our ears in preparation for another long night. It was a cold night, too; a pair of camp boots, which I used to heighten my pillow, remained snow-covered, whilst the neck of my sleeping-bag creaked with the congealed moisture from my breath every time I moved. None of us slept well; to sleep well at high altitudes a man must be very tired and we had had no exercise.

I woke next morning, May 10th, from a desultory slumber to see the tent glowing as though it were on fire; the sun had risen in an unclouded sky. It was a perfect day, but how could we utilise it? There was nearly a foot of new snow and streams of it were pouring like water over the ice cliffs of the North Col. Possibly, on the morrow when the snow had had time to consolidate conditions might be safe.

A calm dawn was succeeded by a wind that blew the snow about in clouds on the glacier. It was fearfully cold, and had it not been for the arctic tents we might have been forced to retreat before this, as no one can stick out such weather as we had experienced since arriving at Camp 3 without deteriorating unless he is warm and moderately comfortable. We were very depressed.

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Not only did the North Col appear more difficult than it had been in 1922 and 1924, but conditions remained continuously and obstinately wintry. With the non-arrival of the Sola-Khombu men our transport might prove inadequate to take advantage of a short spell of fine weather, and we should be reduced to emergency tactics—a dash for the summit by an unsupported party handling its own transport.

We discussed many things but our thoughts always returned to the immediate problems. We agreed that our only hope of climbing the mountain was to take an arctic tent as high as possible and stick out the weather until a fine spell arrived. But could we stick it out? Life at high altitudes is exacting, both mentally and physically. Worn nerves, sore throats, and general debility including loss of weight and lowering of the whole bodily system must be expected. Altogether it was a gloomy prospect.

The night of May 10th was the coldest I ever remember—indeed, as we all agreed, the coldest of the expedition; but it is possible that the altitude intensified the cold, and our camp was pitched on snow and ice, always a colder floor than rock. One thing was very evident: the wind was worse on the glacier plateau than at Camp 3. We had anticipated some shelter at least in the lee of the North Col, but, as already mentioned, the wind seemed to flow down from the Col and the glacier plateau formed a cauldron for its fury.

The morning of May 11th promised better weather, but optimism was at a discount; we felt that Everest was merely playing with us. Once

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again we set off, this time through deep and fatiguing snow, digging out *en route* a dump of ropes and pitons at the foot of the Col. Then again came the treadmill-like action of climbing slopes covered in powdery snow lying loosely on a hardened slippery substratum. The snow got worse and worse as we gained height, and by the time we reached a small crevasse, where the slope steepened considerably, it was obvious that to progress further meant risking avalanches. The snow had about it that smooth velvety appearance suggestive of wind slab, and with Alpine memories of this treacherous kind of snow at the back of my mind I had no hesitation in pronouncing for retreat.

Jack was again going badly. His altitude cough was so violent that it sometimes caused him to vomit his food. Nothing could be more weakening at a high altitude, but, as before, he gallantly insisted on accompanying the party. To cap our discomfiture, the weather showed signs of breaking. Grey clouds came flying out of the west and joined with the mists already streaming from the crest of Everest. On arriving back in camp I sent a note to Hugh telling him of the bad conditions and that all we could do was to play a waiting game.

In spite of reverses and disappointments and the general unpleasantness of life, we were a merry party that evening in the arctic tent, and Raymond, who had recovered from his stomach injury, once again entertained us with some of his stories, which not even an altitude of 22,000 feet could dull in the telling.

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Another windy night followed, but it was some consolation to know that the wind, while doing its best to blow our tents away, was stripping the loose snow from the face of the North Col.

Breakfast next morning was the usual dreary affair. There were the plates with the remains of supper congealed on them, the knives and forks in a similar plight, the cups with their frozen dregs. Of course things should have been cleaned after supper; of course they never were; it was too cold; it was better to creep into one's sleeping-bag and stay there. Then there was the usual wrestle with a recalcitrant cooker; an irksome job, accomplished with cold fingers to the accompaniment of many curses.

But there was at least cause for some satisfaction; the weather was definitely better and the sun shone hotly from an unclouded sky. Two porters arrived from Camp 3 to carry ropes and pitons, and with them we set off for the North Col. As usual, our steps had disappeared, and we had to dig out the fixed ropes. Kick-kick, cut-cut. Waggars and Hugo shared the work of remaking the route—then Eric and I went ahead. Presently we came to the section suspected of wind slab. We halted, and I went ahead on a belayed rope and sounded the slope with my ice axe. The snow varied in depth and hardness; sometimes there was a crust and sometimes not; it could be trusted not to avalanche.

We passed the uppermost limit of our previous reconnaissance. Next came the steep slope, leading up to the great crevasse. It was hard work

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climbing this as the axe had to slice through a superficial covering of powdery or wind-crusted snow into hard *névé*, and I soon discovered that to keep on step-cutting I must economise my energy, and that such economy could only be effected through a deliberate lung action in time with the swing of the ice axe.

The slope steepened, and during the last hundred feet to the crevasse we could stand upright in the steps and touch it with our hands. I have never worked out this angle, but it must be over 50° . It was a relief to gain the nearly level shelf formed by the lower lip of the crevasse. The scene here was superb. At our feet were the depths of the crevasse fading from sunlight to an iridescent green and deeper still to an impenetrable twilight, whilst on either hand rose walls of glistening ice. Fortunately at one point the crevasse was well choked by a mass of snow, possibly the debris of an avalanche. Immediately above it was a concave punch-bowl-like slope, bounded on three sides by ice cliffs, a place to distrust instinctively if only because of the moat-like crevasse at the foot of it.

We slumped down in the snow for a rest. For once we could rest comfortably; as yet no storm clouds had formed and the sun shone from a dark-blue sky with the lambent heat of an arc-lamp. In the north-east were the brown expanses of the Tibetan plateau, and in the far east, in an atmosphere devoid of the slightest haze, the shining battlements of Kangchenjunga. Everest was still a weary way above us, and as I gazed at it I remembered something Mallory had written:

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"We expect no mercy." Neither did we. There is nothing merciful about these altitudes. You may sentimentalise over beauty afterwards, but beauty is far from the mind when you are toiling upwards through the thin, cold air. There is monotony in the snow, hostility in the ice cliffs, cruelty in the yellow outward-shelving slabs. The final pyramid is the inmost citadel of a Giant Grim whose lungs are filled with the breath of storms.

Slowly the warmth, drained away during the slow advance to the crevasse, returned to our feet, and after a snack of food we drove in a piton and let a long length of rope down the slope. Then we continued with the ascent.

After crossing the crevasse and climbing a steep little bank we entered the punch-bowl. Neither Eric nor I fancied the snow here, but after examining it carefully and prodding it with our axes we decided that it was too powdery to avalanche.

The final slope to the foot of the ice wall was steep and the snow upon it, though unlikely to avalanche, was fatiguing to climb owing to a slippery crust a foot or more below the surface. My first thought on reaching the foot of the ice wall was that at all events it was not so formidable as the one Hoerlin, Schneider, Wieland¹ and I had climbed on Kangchenjunga in 1930. My next thought was that, unlike the Kangchenjunga wall, it was perfectly safe from ice avalanches, and could not possibly break away.

¹ Uli Wieland died on Nanga Parbat in 1934. *Requiescat in pace.*

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At its lowest point the wall was about 40 feet high, of which 15 feet were vertical, possibly even overhanging. To right and left it rose abruptly, forming impassable ice cliffs over 100 feet high, and in one cliff, fully 50 feet below the surface of the ice, we were surprised to see a projecting rope end, a relic of the 1922 or the 1924 expedition. It was a proof of the great quantity of snow which falls on the North Col and also of the rapid downward movement of the ice masses, as it is probable that this rope had been carried from the site of Camp 4 which in 1924 was on a ledge only a few feet from the crest of the Col.

Some loose snow that had poured down from above was piled fanwise against the foot of the wall, and this had to be trodden down and consolidated into some sort of a ledge. This done, I began to cut the first step. Directly I swung my ice axe I recognised the ice as the tough, almost rubbery stuff peculiar to the High Himalayas. Cutting steps in such ice is a tiring business, as often the pick sinks into it, as though into glue, without chipping any away, and has to be wriggled out.

At length the first step was made, but when I tried to stand in it, I found it impossible to keep my balance without support from Eric owing to the outward-bulging ice. Jack and Waggars had now arrived, and Jack produced a piton from his rucksack. Although intended for rocks it would at least serve as a belay, and, supported by Eric, I reached up with both arms and, after one abortive attempt, managed to hammer it into the ice. Jack, an Admirable Crichton, had also brought a

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karabiner,¹ and this was attached to the piton ring and the rope passed through it. Provided that the piton would hold, I was now supported from above and able to continue step-cutting without falling off backwards. With my left foot well planted in one step, I cut another step to the right above the overhanging bulge large enough for both feet. The difficulty now was to get first the right and then the left foot across to this step. But first of all a rest was essential as I was panting so rapidly that I felt quite dazed; also, in addition to foot-holds I had cut hand-holds and my hands were losing sensation. At the foot of the wall I soon recovered breath, energy and circulation. Then, feeling better, I set off again, but found that the only way of reaching the new step was to stand on the piton with my right foot. This was by no means easy in the broad, clumsy, high-altitude boot, and at my first attempt my foot slipped and, being now without support from above, I was within an ace of toppling off backwards. Fortunately my left hand-hold and foot-hold prevented this, though the shortness of breath due to such an unexpected exertion nearly caused me to come off anyway. A second attempt was successful, and once both feet were on the capacious hold the worst was accomplished.

Above was ice of an angle of about 70°, covered in loose powdery snow which had to be shovelled away with the gloved hands and the head of the ice axe before steps could be cut. It was savage going. Every minute I had to halt and gasp for breath, and beat my frozen gloves together in an

¹ A metal clip ring.

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effort to keep the circulation going in my hands. At length, to my great relief, the ice axe no longer met pure ice, but hard névé. A few cuts now with the adze end sufficed for a step and progress was rapid. The névé gave place to pure snow, soft on top but well packed beneath, and it was enormously comforting to feel the foot sink deeply into it. I trod out a platform, plunged in the axe up to the head, put the rope round it and sank down for a rest. I was feeling pretty done and my heart was pumping as though it would burst, yet I remember a thrill of exhilaration. This was altogether different from the monotonous work we had so far endured; it was mountaineering.

Presently Eric, climbing in his usual effortless style, joined me. The others had not roped on to him as they had decided to descend and fix ropes in the punch-bowl and on the slopes below the crevasse.

From our position we were able to examine the slopes above. There was no sign of the ledge which accommodated the 1922 and 1924 expeditions, and the only ledge we could see likely to prove large enough for a camp was the one, already noted, some 200 to 300 feet below the crest of the Col. To reach it we first of all plodded across the wide, steeply inclined shelf which might be very dangerous in bad snow, whilst the route up the ice wall formed a natural channel for any avalanches that fell from it. Then we passed to the right of a detached sérac, and ascended diagonally beneath an ice wall to the left of a great blade of curiously stratified ice. Half an hour later we were on the ledge. It was formed by the

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lower lip of a half-choked crevasse, the upper lip being an overhanging ice wall some 30 feet high, whilst above it a very steep slope swept upwards to the crest of the Col. As far as it went it was a good site. There was a nearly level space some 40 feet long and 20 feet broad for the tents, but an obvious disadvantage was the risk of an avalanche falling on to it; furthermore, the ledge was not as near the Col as we could have wished. It was just possible that there was a higher camping site, but we were too tired to explore further: my legs were unusually weak and my heart was still hammering unpleasantly against my ribs.

Murky clouds slid up over the snowy edge of the Col above; snow began to fall and the wind rushing round unexpected corners whipped it rudely into our faces. Down we went, visions of steaming tea in our minds.

In the fading light the ice wall looked terribly forbidding, but mercifully a length of rope attached to an ice axe now dangled over it. Eric went first, and I gave him an additional rope as a safeguard. I could not see him and he could not let me know verbally when he had reached the foot of the wall as his voice had long since departed, but he jerked the rope as a signal for me to follow. It was an unpleasant descent. The wind racing along the crest of the wall whirled the snow viciously into my face, and I had to remove my iced gloves and grip the rope with bare hands: I placed it between my legs, under my right armpit and so over my shoulder and, hoping devoutly that Eric was holding it below so as to prevent any swinging, slid rapidly down through the smother

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of snow and alighted beside him.

It was now late in the afternoon and the cold was increasing. To encourage the circulation to return to our extremities we fairly raced down the punch-bowl to the crevasse. The others had fixed ropes on the slopes below the crevasse, and aided by these we soon descended to the lower slopes. Back in camp our visions of tea materialised, and never did visions materialise more effectively.

That evening we felt more optimistic than we had done for some time; whatever the weather, there was a known route and fixed ropes to help us up it. But the weather, annoyed at our presumption, raised a gale in the night: Jack, Wyn and Waggars, who were to fix a rope ladder on the ice wall and rope up the remaining steep bits of the route on the morrow, would have a dismal time remaking the steps.

May 13th was a rest day for Eric and me, and we descended to Camp 3 to collect the gear we needed for Camp 4 and the higher camps. I was not feeling well; my heart was thumping quickly, and there was a dull, half-strangled sensation about the way it worked. We were greeted by Hugh, who was very pleased that the route to Camp 4 had at last been made. Ferdie had come up from Camp 2; he was much fitter, having recovered quickly from his chest trouble. Tom and George were also there, the latter very depressed at the thought that he was for the time being relegated to Camp 3 to organise the transport between it and Camp 4. He longed as much as anyone for a crack at the mountain and it was very hard luck on him, but as Shebby was too

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unwell with laryngitis to tackle the whole of the transport problem, somebody had to be sacrificed. We did our best to console him by telling him that he was doing as valuable work as anyone, as indeed he was. Hugh was not very fit and was obviously feeling the altitude. He had a very bad throat and on medical advice was about to go down to Camp 2 for a day or two. Bill had been hard at work planning a modified scheme of attack which would make an assault possible with the minimum number of porters, in the event of the non-arrival of the Sola-Khombu men. As we all agreed, there was little enough time in which to climb the mountain before the monsoon arrived. Two more weeks should see the fate of the expedition settled one way or the other.

Eric and I spent some pleasant hours at the camp, then tramped back to Camp 3a. Eric was going well, but I was very tired, and could scarcely drag myself up the glacier. The slightest exertion accelerated my heart and I wondered dismally whether I had strained it on the ice wall beyond all hope of immediate repair. Anyone who makes a severe physical effort over 22,000 feet has to pay for it afterwards.

On the way we met a party of porters returning from the camp after carrying up some more provisions. They grinned and salaamed as they passed us, striding downhill with the loose rolling gait of born mountaineers, and chattering gaily among themselves as though they had not a care in the world. What splendid fellows they were. It was heartening to see them. If it were humanly possible to establish a camp within striking dis-

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tance of the summit they would do it. They made me feel very humble. Here was I trailing miserably up the glacier, with a bumping heart and weak legs, worn-out after a single day's work, and here were they looking as though they were only at the beginning of the expedition, not with many days of exacting toil behind them.

I was thankful to reach camp and drop down on my sleeping-bag too done almost for the hot drink prepared by some Good Samaritan.

There was a full gale that night, and sleep was impossible owing to the drumming of the tent, and sharp crashes due to the impact of sheets of thin ice whipped off the glacier by the wind.

The wind did not drop at dawn as it usually did, but went on for some hours. As soon as it abated Bill, Eric, Hugo and I, with twelve porters, set off to the site of Camp 4. Wyn, Waggars and Jack had done great work the previous day in roping nearly all the route and fixing a rope ladder on the ice wall. They had made the track anew, but as usual the gale had ruined it, and once again we had to kick it out; wretched work; how detestable those slopes had become. The weather was in a fiendish mood. It was putting every obstacle in our path, and doing its best to undermine the spirit of enthusiasm in the expedition.

I noticed grimly that the porters seemed almost to enjoy the ascent. After a few days, they would be as sick as we of the stamping, kicking and cutting. It was a slow job getting them, one by one, up the ladder, and took altogether one and a half hours. Hugo bravely remained at the top of the ladder for both their upward and downward

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passages, and as a result suffered severely from the cold, which gathered like some deadly liquid on the slopes when the sun disappeared behind the North Col.

From the camp site the north ridge of Everest was visible and we gazed up a snow slope extending ribbon-like along the edge of the ridge. This ends at 24,500 feet, and above it is a long stretch of broken rocks leading up to the north-east shoulder, whilst to the right of this is the band of yellow slabs. The north-east ridge forms the uppermost limit of the yellow band and it was silhouetted sharply against a white cloud, streaming away to the south-east. After so many days of kicking, hacking, cutting and scraping in snow and ice, it would be good to feel firm rock beneath the feet.

The porters dumped the loads and we returned to camp. Except on the ladder, they descended unroped, aided by the fixed ropes, and we were soon back in camp. There, Raymond and Tom, who had come up for the day from Camp 3, had some good news for us. Shortly after Eric and I had left Camp 3 on the previous day, forty-eight Sola-Khombu porters had arrived, having come straight through from the Base Camp without a rest, a magnificent effort indicative of the work they would do on the mountain. Our portage problems were now solved, and it remained only to go ahead with the assault—weather permitting. A second piece of news was not so cheerful. Smidge and Tommy had received a weather report by wireless that the monsoon had reached Colombo. This meant an early monsoon, and we

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might have only ten days or a fortnight left in which to climb the mountain. Could we do it? Everything depended on the weather, and the weather was anything but kind.

CHAPTER XII

CAMP FOUR

DURING THE NIGHT OF MAY 14TH WE HAD ONE OF the worst gales I remember. The wind must have reached hurricane force, and how the tents stood up to it I do not know. At the height of the storm a gust lifted the arctic tent bodily in spite of its strong guy ropes and the weight of several men inside it, and for a moment we pictured it bowling merrily down the glacier like a captive balloon broken loose from its moorings. Fortunately only a strut was blown in and another forced out of place. Eric received the collapsed side of the tent on top of him, and it was pitiable to hear him give his opinion of the episode in a hoarse whisper, all that was left of his voice. What with the howl of the gale, the volleying snow and the pistol-like cracking of the canvas, sleep was impossible.

As before, the gale did not drop with the dawn; if anything it increased, stripping the snow from the glacier in sheets and ruthlessly exterminating every step on the North Col slopes.

At ten the wind abated, and Bill, Eric, Wyn, Hugo and I with twelve porters set off to establish

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ourselves at Camp 4. After our long, boring and uncomfortable time at Camp 3a, it was a great relief to leave it for a higher camp, and all of us hoped devoutly that we would not have to return to Camp 3a until someone had climbed the mountain.

The wind was still blowing hard enough to make the climb unpleasant, but once again the porters went splendidly. It was unthinkable conveying them one by one up the rope ladder in the cold wind, so a quicker method was evolved, and all of them were tied together on one long rope separated from one another at such intervals that there were never more than two on the ladder at the same time. Wyn bravely volunteered to see them down again, and I would have stopped to help him, but for almost the first time in my life I had lost all sensation in my feet. Fearing frostbite, I trudged up as quickly as possible to the camp and, finding the arctic tent already erected, pulled off my boots, which were frozen as hard as stones, and began a vigorous massage. Circulation returned gradually and half an hour later all danger of frostbite had passed.

We all agreed that Camp 4 was preferable to Camp 3a owing to its more sheltered position, and our only anxiety was the possibility, at present remote, of an avalanche falling on to it from the steep slope immediately above. But our position, with its view along the Himalayas to Kangchenjunga and north-eastwards over the snow-covered peaks into the brown uplands of Tibet, more than compensated us for this hypothetical disadvantage.

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Unlike members of former expeditions, we were able to enjoy food and had a substantial supper, but I did not sleep until after midnight, owing to the noise of small pieces of ice falling from the upper lip of the crevasse on to the tent.

I awoke before the others next morning, May 16th, and coaxed a "Primus" into action. We were using a half-and-half mixture of petrol and paraffin, on the assumption that paraffin would not vaporise efficiently at 23,000 feet and higher, and once the "Primus" was well warmed it burned well.

The weather looked doubtful and again we felt anxious as to its intentions. True these had been made very plain since we left the Base Camp, but now that Camp 4 was established the operation scheme for the assault was ready to be put into action. Should it fail we might be reduced to an emergency scheme, meaning a rush for the top by an unsupported party, an alternative Hugh was anxious to avoid.

We lounged in our sleeping-bags all the morning, then lunched off tinned kippers. For once the "Primus" was not functioning well. It refused to burn properly and emitted such noxious fumes that I was glad to escape from the tent into the open air and descend to meet the porters under the charge of Jack, Waggers and Raymond who were coming up from Camp 3a.

On the slopes of the North Col the atmosphere was moderately calm, but higher the wind was raising the loose snow, whirling it across the slabs of the yellow band and lifting it far into the air from the crest of the north ridge. The porters

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were all very cheerful in spite of their 40 lb. loads, and I helped Waggers with them on the rope ladder.

Eleven men remained at the camp and were accommodated in a bell tent, and the remaining eight descended to Camp 3a. I manipulated the rope above the ladder, and very glad I was to see the last man safely down, as a bitterly cold wind had seized the opportunity of bombarding me with powdery snow.

The weather had promised ill and Everest weather does not forget; snow fell all night and continued to fall long after dawn. Nothing could be done; ascent or descent were likewise impossible. What wretched luck we were having; the number of fair days since we left the Base Camp could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

At 9 a.m. the sun tried to edge through, but it was a poor, weak sun, and we eyed it derisively. Another anxiety was the possibility of being cut off for several days from Camp 3a; however, we had food and fuel for Europeans and porters for a week. And the monsoon was coming; every day was precious now. Surely we could reasonably hope for a few days of good weather before it arrived? None of us had seen such continuously bad weather in the Himalayas, yet, in spite of all, the porters were of good heart; we could hear them chattering in their tent. What was the use of being pessimistic when we had such men to see us through with the job?

Some consolation was afforded by a magnificent lunch, cooked by Eric over two "Primuses,"

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consisting of royans de la Bordelaise, tinned loganberries with condensed milk and café au lait; a princely repast, except that the acid juice of the tinned loganberries hurt my dry sore throat.

During the afternoon snow continued to fall heavily. Life was very boring. I amused myself with a minute examination of my face in a small pocket mirror. It had been wrecked by sun and wind. Where my beard did not protect it, the skin could be pulled off in large flakes, and my ears were beyond all hope of immediate repair. My nose was moderately sound except for the edges of the nostrils, which were raw and sore, whilst the constant need to wear woollen sweaters had saved my neck. In the matter of lips I was more fortunate than most, and by dint of constant greasing I had saved them from cracking too disastrously, but some of my companions had oozing crevasses and bergschrunds which were painful to contemplate. Worst of all it had become a habit with me during the night to remove scabs when half asleep, so that old cracks were being constantly reopened and were not getting a chance to heal.

The storm continued all the afternoon and, knowing that the snow was accumulating steadily on the slope above the camp, we were a trifle uneasy. We regretted our mail which was due that day, and we thought with envy of those at Camp 3 who in all probability were devouring theirs.

The weather became steadily worse during the afternoon, and by nightfall a blizzard of hurricane

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force was raging. How we blessed our arctic tent. No snow penetrated it except once or twice when the flaps were opened to allow people to pass outside, and then streams of fine powder would pour in. We were comparatively sheltered, but what was it like at Camp 3a? We heard afterwards that the arctic tent there had caved in and nearly carried away.

Curiously enough, most of us slept well in spite of the blizzard, but next morning, May 18th, we discovered that a quantity of powdery snow had managed to creep in between the flaps during the night, and our first job was to shovel it out. There was little improvement in the weather except for occasional gleams of sun, and above us we could hear the wind roaring across the North Col, like great waves on a rocky coast. Yet, for all its malignity, the bad weather appeared to be localised and confined to the Everest region, and now and then through the hurrying mists ranges of sun-warmed hills appeared, and beyond them the amber-coloured plains of Tibet.

No one ascended from Camp 3a, the wind was too violent; but in the afternoon the weather improved, and we all set off to complete the route to the crest of the Col. First, at the end of the ledge supporting the camp, came a steep sérac, which had to be traversed diagonally. After our inactivity it was almost pleasant to wield an ice axe again. The surface of the sérac was composed not of pure ice, but of firm névé in which we cut bucket-like steps. Next came two snow-covered crevasses and a snowy trough. Still ascending diagonally, we reached the foot of an unbroken

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snow slope leading up to the crest of the Col. The shortest route to the lowest point of the Col was a nearly horizontal traverse, but, as the snow here was a doubtful proposition, we decided that straight up to the crest was the safest way. On this last slope the snow was soft and powdery at first, but higher, step-cutting was necessary in wind-blown névé. One by one we popped our heads over the crest and congregated on a narrow edge of hard snow breathing hard. The North Col was won at last.

Immediately beneath was the upper basin of the main Rongbuk glacier, bathed in brilliant sunshine, and above it the gleaming cone of Pumori, a splendid outpost to a tangle of giant peaks. Small fragments of silvery mist hung about the flanks of the nearer peaks, but in the north-west all was sunlit and serene. Only Everest still scowled, and from far above came the growl of the wind, a steady undercurrent of menacing sound. There was something implacably hostile about the great mountain, and in the absence of sun, with a wind-driven smother of flying snow, and a smooth, slate-grey cloud oiling along with extraordinary speed, yet ever forming so quickly as to remain clinging to the summit, it was possible to imagine a vengeful and terrible personality.

We were not on the lowest point of the North Col, and to reach it had to traverse a sharp ridge of hard snow. The wind was strong here, and we were glad of our axes to help balance us against the fierce gusts. It was a sensational crest; as Baedeker might have said: "Not difficult for adepts but requiring a perfectly steady head."

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For perhaps fifty yards it was nearly horizontal, then it descended, broadening out as it did so, to the lowest point of the Col. Here was a site sufficiently large for some tents should dangerous snow compel us to evacuate the ledge and move Camp 4 to a safer place, but one receiving the full force of the north-west wind which, compressed between Everest and the North Peak, charges across the Col. Above the Col rises the long, gradually steepening snow slope already mentioned ending at a height of 24,500 feet, with an easy-looking broken rock crest, the true crest of the north ridge, to one side of it.

So much we saw in a few hurried glances, then turned our backs on Everest and retired along the crest. It was late in the afternoon, and if only the wind had hustled us less, we might have halted to enjoy the splendid view. Pumori was cloud-girdled now, and the mist fragments of an hour ago had grown into stately pillars of cumulus which cast slow-moving shadows on the snow-fields.

As we stepped into the welcome shelter of the leeseide of the Col where our footsteps ran down in a steep, wavering line, there came a last vicious gust of wind that carried a handful of snow from the ridge and cast it rudely into our faces. Everest has no manners.

Kicking vigorously into the already good footholds to stimulate slackening circulation, we descended rapidly to the camp. A few minutes later we were untying our frozen boots in the arctic tent and the "Primus" was roaring with its promise of hot tea.

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The sunset was quietly beautiful, and through the talc window of the tent we saw Kangchenjunga glowing above a level sea of cloud. Was it possible, faintly possible, that the weather was mending?

CHAPTER XIII

BLIZZARD AT CAMP FIVE

NO SNOW FELL DURING THE NIGHT, BUT NEXT morning, May 19th, clouds were moving quickly across Everest from the north-west, whilst an ominous canopy of mist concealed the Arun valley. Exercise and the need to acclimatise more than anything else decided Eric and me to reconnoitre the north ridge.

Our first job was to fix a long length of line up the slope to the Col and to secure it to an ice axe driven into the hard snow of the crest. Once on the Col, we were careful to avoid the corniced eastern edge of the long snow slope already mentioned, as well as some minor crevasses, and at the first opportunity we made for the rocks at the side of the snow. To judge from our pace, we were well acclimatised, and we climbed nearly 1,000 feet in the first hour. On the Col the wind was merely annoying, but higher it was so strong that we could not have continued had the rocks been difficult. It was our first experience of a high wind above 23,000 feet, and it made us realise, even more than the battering we had already en-

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dured, the hostile nature of Everest. Except for the wind, there was nothing particularly malignant about the weather. The usual cloud plume was streaming from the north-east ridge, but in other respects the weather was good, and the sun shone brilliantly. It was just wind, ceaseless, relentless, bullying wind. And wind on Everest is subtly demoralising. An upward step is no longer something interesting and worth doing, but something useless, and the final pyramid of rock with its writhing plume of wind-driven snow, the summit of Everest; it is the epitome of weariness.

I do not know whether pessimism is best countered by being in the front or the rear of a climbing party, but on this occasion when Eric's turn came to set the pace I discovered something reassuring in his beautifully balanced and rhythmic movements which even the wind seemed unable to affect.

At about 24,200 feet we halted and took stock of ourselves and each other. Eric's helmet and face were masked with ice. I saw a movement between an ice-encumbered moustache and beard. He was saying something, but the gale prevented me from hearing. As for me, my gloves were iced and my woollen balaclava helmet glued to my beard.

It was far enough, and I shouted to Eric, "This — wind!" No further explanation or opinion was necessary; we turned and descended.

My legs were tired and it needed a conscious effort to control them, whilst now and then the wind sent us staggering. This wind was a supreme factor. We should court disaster if we tried to

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establish Camp 5 in a similar wind. The porters with their heavy loads could never face it. It would knock all the stuffing out of them, even if it did not inflict dangerous frostbite.

Soon after we regained camp Jack and Wagers arrived from Camp 3a with additional stores and tents for Camps 5 and 6. After three days' isolation we were glad to see them and hear their news. Tom was fitter and had accompanied them to the foot of the ice wall where he had volunteered for the cold, disagreeable job of seeing porters up and down the rope ladder. Camp 4 was now stocked with enough provisions to withstand a siege and at the first opportunity, Camp 5 would be established and the assault begun.

The wind dropped that evening and for the first time since we arrived at Camp 4 the night was calm. I slept well and when I woke the sun was warming the tent and the sky cloudless. Had the Fates relented? Lassitude and pessimism were replaced by energy and optimism, and at 8.45 Wyn, Bill, Hugo and eleven porters set off to make Camp 5. The porters were in splendid fettle and grinned happily as they humped their heavy loads. They were as glad as we to be up and doing. Off they went and, lazily watching in the hot sun, I saw them climb round the icy corner near the camp, trudge slowly up the steep slopes beyond and disappear one by one over a distant edge.

I continued to bask in the sun, the first time this had been possible at Camp 4. The weather remained quiet and the sky unclouded except for the usual plume on Everest, though now and

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again a suspicious fuzziness appeared clinging to the crest of the north ridge. During the afternoon Greene, Wager and Longland, and later Crawford and Brocklebank, arrived from Camp 3a.

Meanwhile, the rest of us watched the progress of the Camp 5 party. They reached a long stretch of broken rock above the snow slope, and there halted for a long time. Why? What was delaying them? The site of Camp 5 was at least 1,000 feet higher. Bill and I had discussed it only the previous day, and had agreed that a break in the ridge at about 25,700 feet was probably the best place. We were still puzzling as to the reason for their non-advance when I had to descend to the ice wall and relieve Jack of the chilly business of bringing porters up the ladder. The sun had already left the slopes and a cold wind soon chased the warmth from my extremities. It was a relief when the porters were all up and I could trudge back to camp. Others had felt the cold during the last part of the ascent, principally because of the inevitable wait at the foot of the ice wall, and the circulation in Raymond's feet was only restored after a long rubbing.

Towards evening the porters of the Camp 5 party began to straggle in; they showed surprisingly few signs of strain or tiredness and fairly scampered down the slopes. We were in the arctic tent puzzling over their report that not only had Camp 5 not been pitched but the loads had been dumped on the rocks just above the top of the snow slope, fully 1,000 feet below the intended site, when Wyn thrust his head in between the flaps. His beard was stiff with ice and an icicle

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several inches long hung from his nose. He brought bad news. There had been a disagreement as to the camping site and Bill, fearing for the porters in the cold wind, had decided to dump the loads on the top of the snow slope and retreat, a decision supported by Hugo but not by Wyn. Each had decided as he thought best, and this failure to establish Camp 5 was primarily due to the fact that the members of the party had never previously climbed together. I think we all realised with some bitterness that we were nothing but a scratch party hastily collected together and sent to climb the highest mountain of the world. This and nothing else had resulted in the failure, and no criticism of the party or any member of it is permissible; indeed, only sympathy can be felt for men placed, through no fault of their own, in such a position.

Lastly came Bill escorting Hugo, who was very tired and going very slowly. The day ended dismally in unproductive argument, criticism and discussion. One unpalatable fact emerged from this: valuable, perhaps vital, time had been lost.

Ferdie and Tom returned to Camp 3a that evening, but Raymond, Waggers and Jack remained at Camp 4; it was obvious now that we should need all our available strength for establishing Camp 5 and launching an assault.

Next morning, May 21st, Eric and I set off to make the route to the site of Camp 5, carrying a quantity of red bunting to mark the way for the party which, it was hoped, would finally establish the camp on the morrow.

The air was calm and warm on the slopes above

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Camp 4, but immediately we reached the crest of the North Col we were met by our inveterate enemy, the wind. We were both in good form, and quickly ascended the broken crest of the ridge, but the wind increased in force the further we advanced. On the Col there was nothing more than a strong breeze, but less than 1,000 feet higher it was blowing a gale. We could hear the gusts approaching and braced ourselves to resist them, but often they sent us staggering. More than once, as we toiled miserably upwards, I asked myself whether it was worth it; this horrible discomfort, these numbed feet, this wind-lacerated face, these cold fingers, this panting, sorely stressed body. I thought of English fields, warm brooks and trees bursting into bud, cricket pitches, the scent of new-mown hay. A useless toil, why endure it? Then I thought, with an inward grin, what a fuss there would be if we reached the summit. We would have to endure long adulatory speeches, our digestions would be ruined by innumerable dinners, we would be pestered by autograph hunters. Here on Everest, at least, there was peace. The aloof pyramid with its flaunting cloud was somehow infinitely satisfying, inspiring and terrible. Those who climb on Everest see life as a mess of warring elements, they realise their completeness and their incompleteness, their nobility and their ignobility. Perhaps that is why men explore; in exploring the earth they explore themselves.

More often than not the thoughts of a climber at high altitudes struggle impotently in an ocean of weariness. Look at something, a rock perhaps;

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you see it, you may even remember it, but there is no instinctive analysis of shape and colour. It does not stimulate a sense of comparison, or set in action any train of deductive thought.

The wind was worse than ever on the top of the snow slope; it was impossible to turn the face into it—it seared the cheekbones. We crouched down, sometimes on hands and knees, to avoid being blown off the ridge. Finally, we halted and looked at one another; our beards, moustaches and balaclava helmets were thick with ice. An imperceptible nod—talking was impossible in the gale—and we began to fight our way downwards.

On the North Col there was little wind by comparison, and strolling along the sharp snow ridge it was difficult to remember the wind 1,000 feet higher. It is curious how quickly the brain forgets discomfort. If this were not so, I doubt if any sane man would return to Everest.

We did not linger on the Col—our toes were dead—and we hurried down to camp where we removed our boots and inspected the damage. It took a long and vigorous rubbing to restore circulation, particularly to my left big toe. Afterwards we both remarked that our toes were sore. We were lucky not to have been frostbitten.

Hugh had come up from Camp 3 with the sad news that poor George had gone down with a stomach ulcer and had been sent back seriously ill to the Base Camp. He had insisted on descending the glacier unaccompanied by a European, a truly sporting effort. Knowing him better than the others I could realise to some slight extent what this meant to him. Everest had been a

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dream of his for many years, and he had taken on a tea-planting job to learn Nepali and be near the Himalayas.

That evening a long discussion took place in the arctic tent, and it was decided that a party consisting of Wyn Harris (in charge), Greene, Birnie and Boustead should establish Camp 5 next day, weather permitting. The following day, weather still permitting, they would establish Camp 6 whilst Birnie and Boustead would escort the porters down and remain in support at Camp 5. Among the porters selected for Camp 6 was Lhakpa Chedi, who was desperately keen to lead his companions to the highest camp, which he swore should be higher than in 1924.

Wyn and Raymond would then reconnoitre the second step and, if possible, attempt the summit. Eric and I were to be a day behind the first party, and would act as a support party to assist them in the event of emergency and afterwards make another attempt on the summit should they fail.

After supper, Hugh visited the porters' tent to explain the plan of campaign. He came back with the cheerful news that all the men were in great spirits. They told him: "Don't be anxious, we mean to carry those loads as far as we possibly can, you will see to-morrow. Then it is up to the sahibs to climb the mountain."

May 22nd dawned fine. If only the weather continued fine we should have a crack at the top, and a spirit of optimism was present in all when Wyn, Raymond, Bill and Hugo and their porters set off, with Hugh, Jack and Waggers accompanying them for the sake of exercise. It was 7.15

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when they left and, as far as we could see, little or no wind was sweeping the north ridge. Eric and I were thankful for a lazy day, for we were both a trifle weak in the legs; the struggle against the wind the previous day had taken it out of us and energy is not easily regained at 23,000 feet.

We were able to sit outside the arctic tent in comparative comfort and watch the party through the telescope as they climbed the north ridge.

Hugh was the first back, having gone as far as the North Col, a great effort for a man of his age. He reported good weather, and that the porters were going splendidly. Then came Jack, with a porter who complained of stomach pains and had been unable to last the course. I went a few yards from the camp and helped to bring the sick man round the steep and awkward ice corner. During the day Tom and Smidge arrived, after laying a telephone line as far as the foot of the ice wall. Smidge, in spite of his lack of mountaineering experience, had climbed well. His arrangements were now nearly complete. At Camp 3 he had installed a wireless linking him with Tommy at the Base Camp, who in turn transmitted news to Darjeeling and received weather reports. Only a telephone wire between Camp 3 and Camp 4 was needed to complete the communications of the expedition.

Shebby, whose laryngitis was better, had accompanied the party to the foot of the ice wall, and when I descended to help with the porters' loads, he croaked up a hoarse but cheerful greeting.

At tea-time Raymond arrived. He was very

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done. In his unacclimatised state, the task had proved beyond him, and we realised now that it had been a mistake for him to go through to Camp 5 without a longer halt for acclimatisation at Camp 4. His heart was beating irregularly and he thought it was dilated. Wagers had taken his place in the first party and everything had gone well, except for the sick porter whose load had been abandoned, and Camp 5 had been established at about 25,700 feet. On the way up, they had passed Finch's 1922 camp about 300 feet above the top of the big snow slope. It was in a comparatively sheltered position between two large boulders, but the wind had torn the tent to ribbons. Oxygen cylinders were scattered around, and one still contained oxygen although it had lain there for eleven years. So dry is the atmosphere on Everest that the valve was unruined, and Raymond had given himself a dose of gas. He said it was so stimulating that for a time he regretted his decision to return. A spool of "Kodak" film was also found near the camp and we wondered whether development would reveal anything of interest.¹ Although feeling very tired, Raymond had taken samples of alveolar air. Only those who have climbed at high altitudes can realise what such devotion to science means.

The porters were naturally tired after an ascent of nearly 3,000 feet, but Hugo had done much to help and encourage them during the descent, and those not retained at Camp 5 arrived back very pleased with themselves for all their weariness. What splendid little men they are; there are none

¹ It proved to be unexposed.

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to compare with them in hardiness and cheerfulness.

The stage was set for the attack. Everything now depended on the weather, and the weather that evening was not promising. We knew that the monsoon was slowly developing in India, and there were signs of it already in the Everest region. Ranks of cumulus clouds had formed in the trench-like Arun valley, and far away in the south great anvil-shaped masses of false cirrus glowed a dull, fiery red at sunset.

I was roused in the night by a light rustling sound. Snow was falling. For a while I listened, then slept again. A good three inches had fallen when we poked our heads out of the tent next morning, May 23rd, and the sun was shining through the drifting mists with a hot, fierce glare. Worst of all the air was warmer, almost breathless it seemed, after the dry, cold air of the past few weeks. This must be the monsoon, or at all events the first breath of it. We were on the edge of things; we might have to race bad weather to the summit and such a race was not pleasant to contemplate. There was too much risk of being caught at a high camp by a heavy snowfall.

There was no wind at Camp 4, but it was blowing on the North Col and at Camp 5 the telescope revealed fluttering tents. Before the first party left, a signalling arrangement had been agreed to. If they had to remain at Camp 5, then Eric and I had to remain at Camp 4, but as far as we could see little or no snow had fallen at Camp 5 and there was every hope that the weather was good enough for them to establish Camp 6. We peered through

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the telescope until our eyes ached, but although we searched the rocks and the neighbouring snow patches, we saw no signs of the sleeping-bags, which were to be displayed in the event of their being unable to start, and in the end we decided to ascend.

The steps below the North Col had been filled up by the freshly fallen snow, and had to be remade. This was hard work, and the forty minutes spent in reaching the Col came as a poor preliminary to the long grind up the north ridge. Once again there was a suspicious weakness in our legs. Were we deteriorating? If so, this was partly due to lack of palatable foods and particularly meat at Camp 4. The high-altitude rations had been based on the experiences of 1922 and 1924, when men had found they could eat little or no solid food. We had been higher longer, and had acclimatised better, and as a result our high-altitude rations had proved insufficient. Various notes imploring those below to send up more substantial food had gone down from Camp 4 but so far without result, for such food was mostly at Camp 2 and lower. Drastic reorganisation was necessary if the climbing party was to maintain its strength. A scientifically worked out rationing scheme had gone by the board as it always will do on Everest. Calories and vitamins look charming when set down on paper in England at sea-level, but high on Everest a man eats what he wants to eat, and no power on earth can make him eat certain things because he ought to eat them unless he also happens to like them.

As we passed along the snow ridge of the Col,

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clouds flew out of the west borne on a cold wind; then, as we began climbing the rocks by the side of the snow slope, snow began to fall. The wind increased as we ascended, and at the top of the snow slope we were climbing heads down in the teeth of a blizzard. We debated whether or not to turn back, but a gleam of sun through the hurrying mists suggested better weather higher. Perhaps, after all, the first party were on their way to Camp 6; in this case our job was to support them, and we decided to continue.

The rocks above the snow slope were easy, and it was only necessary to use the hands occasionally, but ice axes were invaluable in helping us to balance.

Presently we came upon the remains of Finch's tent, looking strangely forlorn with its tattered rags of green canvas flapping from the fallen tent poles, whilst the oxygen cylinders scattered around suggested the encampment of some strange beings from another planet. The ridge is broad hereabouts and less well defined than lower down and there is plenty of choice of route up the shattered rocks.

The wind continued to increase as we made height; once we halted for a rest behind some boulders, but it was seldom that we escaped one iota of its malice. It was snowing heavily now, and visibility was limited to a few yards; however, we were cheered now and again by seeing pieces of red bunting, weighted down by rocks, which the first party had left to mark the route.

The last 500 feet was a real struggle, principally because our legs were weak from the strain of

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maintaining balance in the wind and the consequent impossibility of progressing rhythmically. I noticed that I was taking two breaths for every step. A lead-like leg swung forwards and upwards, puff, puff; slowly, and with a conscious effort, the weight was transferred to the forward foot, and another lead-like leg was thrust forwards and upwards, puff, puff. And so it went on.

We had seen no bunting for some time and were becoming anxious lest we should miss the camp, when we came to a slope of screes and snow above which something unnaturally clear-cut loomed through the blizzard—the camp. Hugo was the first to greet us; the Camp 6 party had been unable to start. For the moment we were too tired to grasp the significance of this. Then we saw that there were only two Meade tents, which could accommodate only two climbers apiece. As I realised this there came to me a feeling of more than ordinary fatigue; to return again to Camp 4 through the blizzard *might* be possible, but it would not be easy. But Wyn and Wagers realised the state of the case and at once volunteered to descend and relieve the congestion. It was unselfish of them, more unselfish than any of us realised at the time. It meant abandoning their attempt, and relinquishing altitude strenuously won. I do not believe Eric and I even thanked them. We accepted their decision as something inevitable, an instance of co-operation that neither expects recognition nor demands thanks. They told us that they had had a very bad night, and that the wind had hammered the camp and done its best to hurl it from the ridge on to the East

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Rongbuk glacier; then they packed their rucksacks and a minute later disappeared into the blizzard.

With their departure we did our best to make ourselves comfortable. As already noted, two tents had been pitched for climbers, and a few feet lower were some porters' tents. To facilitate cooking and conversation the tents had been pitched entrance to entrance. This was satisfactory as regards the tent with the entrance away from the wind, but the tent occupied by Eric and me had its entrance facing the wind and, although partially sheltered by the tent shared by Bill and Hugo, was not proof against the fine powdery snow which penetrated the flaps, however carefully these were tied. We did our best to remedy this state of affairs, but without success. But what was much worse was the inability of the thin tent fabric to resist the finer particles of snow which hour by hour penetrated it and covered everything in the tent.

At sundown the wind abated somewhat, snow ceased to fall and the clouds vanished from the upper part of Everest. We had no thermometer, but the cold seemed greater than any we had yet experienced, and there is little doubt that the temperature rivalled the lowest recorded on the expedition.¹ There was a belated gleam of golden sunlight, and through the gauze-covered window of the tent we saw a clear sky, and below, a far-stretching sea of clouds from which the higher peaks stood out like islands. I was rested now and there was a hot drink inside me; interest

¹ - 23° F. at Camp 2.

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revived and with it an ambition to take photographs. Here was a scene worth recording, and I crawled out of the tent on to the scree-covered shelf. The wind met me immediately—embraced me is more descriptive, for it seemed to wrap itself about me with a deathly coldness. As quickly as I could I fumbled with my camera, and shot off two or three photographs. What a scene to step into out of a little tent! One peak, and one alone, challenged our altitude, Chō-oyu, 26,870 feet. Hard by rose another great mountain, Gyachung Kang, 25,990 feet. The sun was only a little way above the horizon and there was no warmth in it. There was no warmth in anything; the world was given over to an all-pervading cold. Emphasising our isolation were the clouds stretching in regular woolly waves as far as the eye could see. Even the North Col was below them, and our friends at Camp 4 could not have seen us even had they wished. We were alone; the eye might pass from horizon to horizon without seeing a single sign of man. The cloud crests were tinged with gold, and the troughs between were a pallid grey. North-westwards the peaks were undescribably savage, and their pitiless steepness was emphasised by scimitar-like blades of ice, reddened by the sun as though steeped in blood. And above rose Everest, bleak and pale, seeming almost to repel the golden sunlight. Little whorls of snow were hurrying across it, now rising upwards and vanishing into the deepening blue of the sky, now forming out of apparent nothingness, a constant transmutation of restless energy.

It was magnificent but deadly. Suddenly I

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realised that my camera was slipping from my numbed fingers. Clutching it, I crawled back into the little tent, where for the next hour I was occupied in restoring circulation.

The sun sank, and a pale afterglow invested the camp, quickly superseded by the night. With darkness, the wind rose again and the tents soon developed a steady drumming, and from drumming a pulsating booming and pistol-like cracking of their fabric. We were in for a bad night. We scraped together some snow and filled a saucepan which we placed over a Tommy's cooker, but it was an hour before we got a drink of tea, and this we failed to raise to boiling-point as there was a temperature at which the heat lost from the saucepan through contact with the cold air was equal to the heat gained. At this altitude solid methylated fuel is hopelessly inefficient.

Our supper consisted of condensed milk, "Ovaltine" and sardines. It was good as far as it went, but not solid enough, and there is something peculiarly unappetising about a frozen sardine in gelatinous oil at 25,700 feet.

Supper over we settled down for a long night. We were both fairly warm in our double eider-down sleeping-bag with spare sleeping-bags in lieu of mattresses beneath us to insulate us from the cold of rocky ground. Unfortunately this last had not been properly levelled: the porters had been too tired, and the peaks, valleys and ridges beneath us were not conducive to sleep. In vain we tossed and turned trying vainly to discover some hollow into which we might wedge our sore hips. Finally, we found that the most comfort-

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able as well as the warmest position was lying back to back pressed closely together.

Meanwhile the wind increased, blowing the powdery snow through the frail canvas, miserable material for a job of this sort, while even more snow penetrated the flaps and the holes at each end of the tent, through which ran the ridge guy rope. In an hour we were liberally sprinkled with snow, in two hours we were covered by an inch or more of the same cold material. I tried in vain to escape it, by tucking my head into my sleeping-bag, but soon had to withdraw, gasping from lack of oxygen. The snow accumulated in our beards, where our breath congealed it into ice; it covered our balaclava helmets, and penetrated the necks of our sleeping-bags. So we lay, while the long, sleepless hours span out to a dismal dawn.

Our provisions in one corner of the tent had to be dug out of the snow before we could breakfast. Then we waited for the sun, and waited in vain. Instead, grey clouds came flying out of the west bringing a smother of snow. There was no question of further advance. Bill and Hugo had slept better than we, as not so much snow had penetrated their tent, and no movement came from the porters, whose tents were a few yards away; we hoped that they were warm and comfortable; at all events they were provided with equipment similar to ours.

Towards midday the sun put in a feeble appearance and there was some talk of setting off to Camp 6, but the wind settled that idea when it roared across the huge expanse of slabs and flung

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the snow it had collected upon the camp in a furious blizzard.

We talked little, our throats were too sore, and Eric could only speak in a hoarse whisper. What we did say was confined to our immediate comfort, of which there was a noticeable lack, and we agreed that it was the worst weather and the worst camp we had ever endured. Yet, somehow or other, time passed. In this respect high altitudes are merciful. A man is too lethargic to feel bored, and lethargy is the keynote in high-altitude mountaineering. On Everest it is an effort to cook, an effort to talk, an effort to think, almost too much of an effort to live.

Daylight failed. There was a faint golden gleam through the murk, Everest's one concession on a day of unmitigated ferocity.

The wind responded to nightfall by rising to a fury such as I have never before experienced in a tent. The thin canvas flapped and cracked wildly, as though incensed with a thousand devils clutching gleefully at every fold. Each gust worked itself up into an orgasm of fury, only to be followed by an even worse gust. Three yards away was the edge of Everest's north-east precipice and the wind was blowing straight over it. Suddenly one guy rope tore loose. The side of the tent nearest to Eric billowed in. He endeavoured to press it back by lying against it with the whole weight of his body, but the fabric was held by the wind pressure as tightly as a football. If another guy went we might be blown, tent and all, over the precipice.

Somehow or other I extricated myself from

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my sleeping-bag and dragged on my windproof trousers, then went through the usual exhausting acrobatics of getting my windproof jacket over my head and shoulders. Lastly I pulled on my granite-like boots. The tapes closing the tent flaps were frozen; it was impossible to unlace them in gloves, and by the time I had done so in bare hands, my fingers had lost sensation. This done I crawled out of the tent on hands and knees. It was not completely dark and the western sky was faintly green. A smother of snow was raging across the rocks, and through this I saw the errant guy. It had pulled away from two large stones to which it had been attached, and so great had been the strain that the stones, which cannot have weighed less than one hundredweight, had been shifted bodily. By dint of considerable exertion in a momentary lull I managed to reattach it and tighten it. Then I crawled around on hands and knees—it was not safe to stand in the wind—and after some minutes managed to find additional stones with which to reinforce the guy. Finally, exhausted by the effort, I struggled into the tent and flopped down on my sleeping-bag gasping for breath.

It was some time before I recovered sufficiently to get into my sleeping-bag. Unluckily we had had our suppers before this episode, and brief though my excursion outside had been, it was long enough for the wind to subtract the warmth from my extremities. After an hour or so I managed to restore circulation to my fingers, but my feet remained like marble slabs all night, and partly for this reason and partly because of the storm,

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I did not sleep at all.

At midnight the wind suddenly dropped, and at 1 a.m. we discussed the possibility of starting at once and attempting to reach the summit the same day from Camp 5. There was nothing new in this suggestion, as we had already talked it over as a last alternative in the event of a failure to establish Camp 6, yet we both knew in our hearts that the chance of success was infinitesimal. The suggestion could not be taken seriously; it would be asking too much of ourselves after two wretched nights, and too much of the weather. Curiously enough, a little later Hugo crawled across from the other tent and made a similar proposal.

At 6 a.m. there did indeed seem some hope of pushing on towards Camp 6, and Hugo with grim determination roused the porters and told them to get ready to start. Splendid men, they at once responded. But then, yet again, came the wind. It was not so violent as before, but it was colder if that were possible. Even so, Hugo was still determined to push on, and got the porters out of their tents. It was a gesture, nothing more; to push on meant certain catastrophe. Although we did not know it at the time, four men were already frostbitten.

Retreat was imperative, so agreed Eric, Bill and I. Our plans had miscarried. For the time being we were beaten. There was no porters' food left—we had not bargained to keep so many men at Camp 5 for so long; and there was no disguising the fact that the battering had told upon us. The porters had retreated to their tents, and along with

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the others I went outside to persuade them to start down. The wind and the cold were dreadful, and in a few minutes my hands, although protected by heavy gloves, had lost all sensation, and I could not move them; they were stiff and dead and seemed not to belong to me. Unless I did something for them they would be dangerously frost-bitten, so I retreated to the tent, and kneeling inside it feebly beat them together, gasping for breath the while. I had done this for some minutes without effect, when one of the porters—I wish I could remember which one, for I was too done at the time to take note of him—seeing how it was with me, came into the tent and for fully a quarter of an hour rubbed and pummelled them between his own until the circulation began to return. It was an agonising process, and I remember twisting and groaning with pain. His own must have been frostbitten at the time, as by this time all the porters were more or less frost-bitten. Such is the spirit and devotion of the Sherpa porter.

We collapsed the tents by letting go the end guy ropes, or they would be blown away otherwise, then began the descent through the blizzard.

It was a miserable procession, and as I watched the dim shapes of my companions lurching slowly through the clouds of wind-driven snow, I reflected with a certain grim humour that this, May 25th, was Ascension Day. We had made a serious, well-planned attempt upon the mountain, and it had failed. We were all of us worn out with the strain, and some were frostbitten.

Both wind and cold decreased steadily as we

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descended. In comparison it was almost genial 1,000 feet above the North Col. Yet Hugh, describing his experiences of this same day in "Everest, 1933," wrote: "But the wind is a torture. It hurts the eyes in spite of protecting goggles. It imprisons the limbs in a grip like that of fast-running icy water, till every step upward is a battle. The fingers of the hand holding the ice axe stiffen under the glove and have to be prised open and beaten to restore circulation. Worst of all perhaps is the searing cold of the air drawn into the over-driven lungs. Movement becomes almost automatic . . ." To us, the conditions he described seemed almost genial after the blizzard at Camp 5.

On the rocks above the North Col we met a large party consisting of Hugh, Wyn, Waggors, Ferdie and Jack with ten porters who had come up to render assistance. There was no question of the ascending party going on to Camp 5 as had been originally planned, and the two parties joined forces and descended to Camp 4.

On the way down the long snow slope Bill had a narrow escape. To save time and energy he tried to glissade, but the snow was hard and icy, and he quickly got out of control. The snow not only slopes downwards towards the North Col, but outwards to the east, and ends above a precipice 2,000 feet high falling to the East Rongbuk glacier. Towards this precipice he began to slide head downwards at an ever-increasing speed. Fortunately some porters were descending nearby and Da Tsering took a flying leap at him and managed to stop him. It was great presence of

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mind, but Da Tsering regarded it as a huge joke, and burst into a roar of laughter as did the other porters. Bill's only damage was a strained leg, but it was a near thing. This was the only untoward incident, but before reaching Camp 4 Lhakpa Chedi and one or two others among the Camp 5 porters were on the point of collapse and needed assistance. Like us, they had shot their bolt.

So at length we arrived at Camp 4, where the arctic tent seemed like a palace after the miserable snow-riddled tents at Camp 5. Here we took stock of ourselves. We were a very different party from the party that had set out so confidently only a few days before. Of the porters all were frost-bitten, two of them, Lhakpa Chedi and Pasang,¹ seriously. Only one, the lion-hearted little Ang Tarke, was likely to go high again, the rest would have to be sent down as quickly as possible to the Base Camp for medical treatment. That evening when they showed their toes and fingers to Raymond, who, in spite of his strained heart, had insisted on remaining at Camp 4, I think Hugh and the others were able to appreciate something of what they and we had endured at Camp 5.

The Europeans of the party had suffered less. Both my big toes were slightly affected and all the tips of my fingers, and when at length I managed to restore circulation I felt as though I had been kicking at a brick wall with bare feet, and holding on at the same time to a red-hot oven with my fingers. We were all very tired, not ordinary fatigue, but that deadly sort of tiredness which is

¹ Lhakpa Chedi subsequently lost two fingers and Pasang one.

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as much mental as physical, and there was a weakness in our legs which could only be the result of remaining too long at a high altitude. To fit ourselves for another attempt we must rest and eat.

There was a gloomy party at supper in the arctic tent. We had taken a knock and no mistake. Everest had proved merciless. In 1922 and 1924, the principal bogey was altitude; in 1933, it was the weather. We were determined to try again, but our determination was different from what it had been before; enjoyment and optimism no longer existed for us. Everest had become a job of dour and exacting work that had got to be done—somehow.

CHAPTER XIV

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THE MONSOON WAS FAST DEVELOPING AND A further complication was evident at Camp 4. The snow was accumulating on the slopes above the camp, and already small masses had slid over the ice wall immediately above the camp and landed beside the tents.

I slept like a log, but was rudely awakened next morning by a sudden rushing sound followed by a dull roar. An avalanche? No, nothing but a miniature slide weighing a few hundredweights and making a noise out of all proportion to its bulk.

According to some, who had slept less, several slides had come down, fortunately without striking the tents. Six inches of snow had fallen overnight, and there was a grave danger that an avalanche might obliterate the camp. Two courses were decided on: firstly, several would descend to Camp 3 to relieve the congestion, and secondly, the camp would be transferred to the crest of the North Col where it would be safe from avalanches. We might have to besiege Everest

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for some time, and it was inexpedient to tire out porters wanted for high camps, by making them carry provisions up to Camp 4 for any but the climbing and support parties. Whether there was time for another attempt on the summit depended on the monsoon, and there were ominous signs that the advance guard had reached the Everest region. The cloud in the valleys was increasing daily, snowstorms on or below the North Col were becoming more frequent, and there was a moist feeling in the air.

Wyn Harris, Wager, Birnie, Longland, Shipton and I were to remain at Camp 4 with provisions for two or three weeks, so that in the event of a fall of monsoon snow cutting us off from Camp 3 for some time, we should not be forced to decide between the evil alternatives of starvation or a dangerous descent. There was only one dissident to this scheme: Hugo, whose military instincts were all against complete isolation eventuating from a breakdown of communications. As an alternative he suggested withdrawing to Camp 3, and attempting to climb Everest by its north-east ridge. This suggestion could not be considered seriously: it was tantamount to another expedition and meant abandoning Camp 5 and the equipment there for Camp 6. Also, the north-east ridge is a doubtful proposition; it is very long, and in places the difficulties are obviously formidable; any attempt to climb it would have to be prefaced by a reconnaissance.

During the day we moved the camp to the North Col. Fortunately, at its lowest point, the crest is broad, and here, after some laborious levelling,

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two arctic tents were pitched, one for the climbers and one for the porters.

It meant two carries by the porters to tranship the camp to the new site, and operations were hampered to begin with by the soft, freshly fallen snow and the need to remake the route.

During our absence at Camp 5, the telephone line had been connected to Camp 4, and an apparatus installed. It had now to be extended to the new camp, but unfortunately it was too short and ended on the crest of the Col about one hundred yards from the camp. It was the windiest possible spot for the world's highest telephone booth, and we devoutly hoped we should not have to visit it often. Our one consolation was that as it was only connected to Camp 3, we could not get a wrong number.

Meanwhile, Rutledge, Crawford, Greene and Brocklebank descended to Camp 3, escorting the frostbitten Camp 5 porters. We heard afterwards that they had some difficulty in persuading the men to leave their tent; the strain had told hardly upon them, and one or two were well-nigh demoralised. One, Tsin Nurbu, my first camera man, chewed a red sweet and then spat on the snow in an attempt to convince Raymond that he was suffering from some terrible disease of the lungs, whilst it took an hour or more to persuade two other men to move. At the same time it is worth mentioning that one of the Pasangs resisted all temptation to self-pity and roared with laughter at the sight of his frostbitten fingers, which were beginning to look like hideously distorted carrots, though they must have been paining him terribly.

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It takes a hero to rise superior to his physical frailties.

When we parted from Hugh he wished us good luck, and we knew that behind this banal expression there was a prayer for our safety and success. His was the hardest part, to lead and yet not be in the forefront of the battle. He would spend anxious days and nights at Camp 3. Neither he nor we had any illusions left as to what Everest could do, yet our attempt must never degenerate into a mere gamble with fate. Mallory laid down the code for Everest climbers when he wrote: "Principles, time-honoured in the Alpine Club, must of course be respected in the ascent of Mount Everest. The party must keep a margin of safety. It is not to be a mad enterprise rashly pushed on regardless of danger. The ill-considered acceptance of any and every risk has no part in the essence of persevering courage. A mountaineering enterprise may keep sanity and sound judgment and remain an adventure."

We had expected wind on the exposed crest of the Col, but the evening was the calmest we had so far experienced above Camp 3. In the cwm formed by the head of the main Rongbuk glacier clouds had gathered like a fleet of silvery airships. One lingered stationary on the icy cone of Pumori; and far beyond the labyrinth of peaks stretching north-westwards from Everest, copper-coloured masses of false cirrus were ranged like titanic anvils. As the shadows lengthened the folds and sinews of the snow were revealed. Slowly the colour of the clouds changed from silver and copper to grey. Some light mists on Everest

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melted away, and the final pyramid ventured a bleak smile in the westering sun. Westwards in a sky of vivid green, slender threads of cirrus scored red slashes in the sky, and eastwards Kangchenjunga was already drowned in the swift-spreading darkness.

Optimism revived that evening in the arctic tent. Our one grouse was food. Many messages had been sent down imploring our transport officers to send up something more substantial, but as yet little or nothing had been done. We had not foreseen, and were now unable to satisfy, our high-altitude appetites. Before he descended Hugh had promised to see to this matter personally. Meanwhile, we must continue to exist on the now utterly unpalatable "slops."

Our greatest craving was for fresh fruit and vegetables. In my imagination I used to picture an orchard of rosy-cheeked apples, plums and pears, and a green salad. We would have pawned our birthrights for a green salad. Raymond had urged that the expedition should be supplied with fresh fruit and vegetables from Kalimpong or Gangtok, and tentative arrangements had been made for their transport, but had later been cancelled on the score of extra expense. Yet, there had been some two dozen mules carrying wireless apparatus; wireless apparatus versus a green salad! At Camp 4 that evening we felt entitled to a good grouse.

Not all the equipment had been brought up; we had no mattresses, and as a result slept badly. I would not have slept at all had not Waggars insisted on tucking half a blanket beneath me.

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There was little or no wind, though our situation tempted every wind that blew.

The sun reached the camp early next morning, May 27th. The air was calm, and we lay in our sleeping-bags scarcely able to credit the fact. Then we ventured outside. The sun was hot, positively hot, and a deep peace had fallen on Everest. Gone were the clouds of wind-driven snow, and the yellow crags cut serenely into a dark-blue sky. Below, the clouds still concealed the valleys, but they had shrunk appreciably and were powerless to harm us; the slanting rays of the sun were just touching their topmost billows.

Someone carried the telephone box along the ridge after breakfast and, connecting it to the wire, rang up Camp 3. Hugh replied that a weather report received from Alipore said that the oncoming monsoon had weakened temporarily. This report, sent by telegraph to Richards at Darjeeling, had been relayed by wireless to the Base Camp and Camp 3, then by telephone line to the North Col.

It was necessary to rest the porters after their strenuous efforts of yesterday in carrying up Camp 4 to the Col, but it was tantalising, even exasperating, to do nothing save watch thin mists slowly floating across the face of Everest. We remained in our sleeping-bags until the afternoon, when Eric and I descended to collect various things from the lower camp. There we met Ferdie, and Willy McLean, with some porters carrying five loads of food. Luxuries and solids at last! Hugh had done wonders at Camp 3. We grinned happily at one another and our mouths

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watered as we promised ourselves any number of gastronomical permutations and combinations. Ferdie and Tom had done magnificent work the past ten days. Nothing could be more boring or fatiguing than convoying porters up and down those monotonous slopes, yet here was Ferdie again, fresh as paint and full of vim and good cheer.

We were surprised to see Willy, as we had not expected him; he seemed much fitter and might be invaluable a little later, when the assault was renewed and exhausted or frostbitten men returned from the higher camps.

We climbed leisurely back to camp, for once without cutting or step-kicking, noticing, however, that Kusang, one of our best men, seemed very tired. Was the strain of prolonged residence at high altitudes beginning to tell on our porters? They would need to be at their best to carry a camp to 27,000 feet.

What a feast we had for dinner! As an *hors d'œuvre*, biscuits and "Patum Peperium"; then an old friend of the mountaineer, "Maggi" soup; the *entrée* was beans; the joint, bully beef with mixed pickles and pickled walnuts; and the sweet, strawberry jelly; at least, it would have been jelly had it been given time to set. Odd corners were filled with biscuits, chocolates and toffee. And so to bed, but I for one had over-eaten.

We should have risen early next morning, May 28th, but our digestive processes had needed a long night, and it was not until 8 a.m. that Wyn, Waggars, Jack and Bill left for Camp 5 with their twelve porters. The morning was calm and

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brilliantly fine. Was this the long-hoped-for spell of quiescent weather prior to the monsoon when the north-west wind is held at bay by the strengthening southerly current of the advancing monsoon?

For some time Eric and I stood outside the tent in the sun watching, as slowly and methodically they mounted the ridge. We did not altogether like the look of the sky with its streaks of gleaming iridescent cirrus, whilst far below, a sea of cloud, which for the past few days had concealed the lower valleys, had increased in height a little. However, Waggars, always a cautious fellow as befits a meteorologist, had been almost optimistic.

At 10.30 I carried the telephone box along the ridge, connected it to the wire and, squatting down on the sharp snow edge, talked to Smidge, who gave me the latest weather report from Alipore, prophesying high cloud in the Everest region and snow showers on the morrow. Then Hugh came to the telephone and I described last night's dinner in detail, whereat I heard him chuckle. He said that a watch would be kept at Camp 3 on the upper part of the mountain during the assaults.

Soon after I returned to camp, Eric saw a solitary porter descending the ridge. As he was going very slowly and appeared exhausted, we went out to help him down. When we got up to him it proved to be Kusang. There was a drawn, staring expression in his eyes; he was completely done, and we had to support him between us; yet he never once failed to muster an invincible grin, although he scarcely seemed to realise where he

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was. He had not got very far, probably not higher than the top of the snow slope. We saw him into his sleeping-bag and gave him a hot drink.

After this, we lunched and again enjoyed a princely feast. Indeed, my principal memory of that day is of the food we ate.

The weather remained quiet throughout the afternoon, and towards evening the three porters not retained for Camp 6 returned. Unlike Kusang they were little affected by their long, hard carry and were full of beans. They told us that Bill had gone badly owing to his strained leg, but had made a great effort and eventually reached the camp long after the others.

A calm evening was succeeded by a calm night. After the hurricanes we had endured it was queer to hear nothing but a desultory breeze rustling past the tent. For weeks, try as we would, we had been unable to escape the wind, and here we were on the North Col, the windiest place of all, in comparative peace. Everest is a mountain of weather paradoxes.

The morning of May 29th was fine and calm. Three good days in succession, it was more than we had dared hope for. Eric and I were early out of our sleeping-bags; outside the tent the light was dazzling, and Everest lifted serenely into a sky of deep, pure blue.

There could be no error this time, Wyn, Waggars and Jack would establish Camp 6: it remained only to see how high they pitched it. We gazed upwards at the rocks. Camp 5 was invisible and we could see no sign of the party.

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among the broken crags above it. The gods slept quietly, and in all the vast stage of peak and sky we could discern no movement.

Beneath, the valley clouds were much as we had seen them for the past two days and there was no upward stirring of their white billows. Yet it could only be a matter of days, perhaps hours, before the furies were unleashed again. We must take and enjoy the rare gifts of hope and pleasure when they were presented.

There was no hurry, and we breakfasted leisurely. It was likely to be our last comfortable meal for some days. After breakfast we packed our rucksacks. Apart from extra clothing we carried nothing save a small camera and one or two film packs; every extra ounce depletes the store of energy at high altitudes. Then, in the warm sunlight, we set out on the first stage of our journey.

It was the fourth time we had climbed the north ridge. Previously we had made height at the rate of about 1,000 feet in the first hour, but now, to husband our strength, we climbed at about half that speed. At the same time I do not believe we could have climbed quickly even had we tried, as long residence at high altitudes and our experiences at Camp 5 had told against us. We were both of us a stone or so down in weight and as a result more vulnerable to wind and cold, whilst, in my case, my frostbitten toes were hurting when I put my weight on them. Lastly, our throats were in poor shape. Mine was merely sore, but Eric's was far worse; he was almost speechless, and it was obvious that his strength was being

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slowly worn down by the constant discomfort. By no stretch of imagination could we be said to be at our best. It remained to be seen whether acclimatisation—and we were splendidly acclimatised—could weight the scales against deterioration.

There is no man with whom I climb better than Eric. In pace and rhythm he is the beau-ideal of a mountaineer. He flows rather than climbs uphill and it is an education to climb with him. There was never any need to halt, and height was gained as calmly and inevitably as a clock hand mounts to the hour.

After less than an hour we began to feel the wind; it poured out of the west in cold douches which strengthened gradually as we gained height. The weather was breaking. The fine morning flickered and went out. Clouds formed above and below. By the time Finch's camp was behind a blizzard was threatening. Another blizzard at Camp 5, it was unthinkable. And the Camp 6 party? Were they doomed to fail without even reconnoitring the second step? We had left Camp 4 full of hope and now hope had been supplanted by the familiar feeling of advancing in opposition to something implacably hostile and relentless. Already a leaden rush of snow concealed the pyramid. Camp 6 must have been established by now, but Jack would be hard put to it to steer his tired men down the complicated mountainside.

In the dull light the crags between which we threaded our way assumed queer, even sinister shapes. I remember one that exhibited the profile

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of an old man with a great hooked nose and a leering grin. At high altitudes fancy weaves queer thoughts that come and go like timid ghosts on a formless background of inertia and fatigue.

A broken edge of decaying rock where a strip of red bunting rippled forlornly in the rising gale, a scree slope and the tents of Camp 5 appeared a few yards ahead through clouds of driving snow. The ascent of 2,700 feet had taken five hours.

We slumped down thankfully in one of the tents, too tired for the time being to unlace our boots or remove our ice-caked windproofs. Bill had been expecting us and had thoughtfully preserved a hot drink in a thermos flask. He looked very tired and worn. At the best of times he could ill afford to lose flesh and he was now, for all his layers of clothing, little more than a skeleton. Yet he told us of his determination to remain at Camp 5 as long as his support was needed. He knew what this meant, as he had already endured four nights there in the blizzard which routed the first attempt. We admired his fortitude; what worse can a man endure than several nights at such an elevation in a small tent on an exposed and wind-swept ridge without any prospect of attempting the summit?

As we lay in the tent the blizzard steadily strengthened. Now and again we poked our heads outside, but nothing could we see but a few yards of mountainside where the driven snow rushed in whirling clouds. What of Jack and the Camp 6 porters? As the afternoon wore on we became more and more anxious. Bill told us that the party had set off from Camp 5 diagonally across the north face, where there was nothing

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definite—nothing but a vast expanse of shattered outward-dipping slabs with patches of screes and steep little walls which would only complicate direction finding in thick weather. The party could not pass to the east of the camp where precipices fall to the East Rongbuk glacier, but they might easily pass to the west of it without seeing it and descend unwittingly the steepening north face of the mountain. If they did—— It was better not to dwell on the thought, a thought of tired-out men lost on one of the greatest of mountainsides, wandering helplessly and without sufficient strength to reascend and search for the right route.

The afternoon lengthened, and a premature gloom gathered as the blizzard thickened. Suddenly we heard something above the roar of the wind. A dim figure showed through the murk, then another and another. There was a relieved shout and one by one the porters came scrambling down the rocks to the camp. Among them was Jack. He was unrecognisable; his eyebrows, his eyelashes, his moustache were ruined and caked with snow and ice, his beard was a mass of ice; icicles inches long hung from his nostrils.

"A drink?" There was no need to ask. We had it ready and he gulped it down. His eyes were bloodshot and strained from the effort of peering into the blizzard. He spoke shortly, tersely, breathing hard the while; he was very tired but the fire of mental energy burned as brightly as ever. "The camp?" Yes, it had been pitched on the yellow band at about 27,400 feet. It was splendid news. And the porters had

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climbed magnificently. He flung a flat object on to the floor—a folding lantern in a leather case. They had come across the remains of the 1924 Camp 6 and it was lying among the debris. Also an electric torch—one of the porters brought it into the tent, an old-fashioned mechanical dynamo-driven affair.¹ I picked it up and pressed the lever. Instantly the dynamo hummed and the bulb lit up. It had lain there for nine years and not a speck of rust adhered to it.

The party had descended by a different route. They had ascended the yellow band more or less directly, but on the descent Jack had discovered a ledge traversing horizontally towards the north-east shoulder. From the end of this a short, steep descent brought them to easier ground. Thenceforward he decided to follow the crest of the north ridge as, owing to the blizzard, a descent of the north face might involve them in difficulties. It was a wise decision.

Several rock towers barred direct access to the ridge, and they had to descend the north face some distance before they were able to traverse to the ridge crest below these obstacles. Here, all Jack's instinct for route finding was needed. A mistake would have brought them to one side or other of the ridge, which is never well defined but forms an obtuse angle between the north and north-east faces of the mountain. At this juncture the storm burst in full fury. As Rutledge wrote: "In a few seconds Nature seemed to go mad. The far horizons vanished as the voice of the wind rose to a scream and the snow tore past in blinding

¹ Manufactured by the General Electric Company.

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sheets. The effect upon tired men may be imagined. Their world disappeared, their goggles iced up till they had to be discarded, whereupon their eyelashes froze together, making it difficult to see at all. They were literally fighting for their lives. Well for them that they had a great leader and a great mountaineer at their head." In Jack's own words: "Visibility suddenly narrowed to a snow-swept circle of some twenty yards—and I was taking a party down a ridge which I had never been on before, but which I knew to be ill-defined and easy to lose, particularly in such conditions."

A fine morning—then this, Everest in its deadliest mood. Everything depended on keeping the men together. Had one collapsed through fatigue the result must have been disaster, but the Sherpas responded with that gallantry born of moral as well as physical courage. Heads bent to mitigate the cutting lash of the wind on their tortured flesh, they grimly fought their way downwards. They gained the ridge and a few feet lower came upon the remains of the 1924 Camp 6, some rags of green canvas and collapsed tent poles in a shallow hollow, slightly sheltered from the full force of the storm. Here they halted for a few moments and, their spirits revived by the discovery, rummaged about for "souvenirs" amid the pathetic remnants—the last camp of Mallory and Irvine.

They continued, but about 200 feet lower a terrible thought flashed into Jack's mind. Were they still on the north ridge or had they been tricked into descending the north-east face which lower falls in precipices to the East Rongbuk glacier? If so, there was no hope of forcing the

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men back uphill to the ridge. They were too tired. Some were already halting to rest at intervals, and required continual encouragement. On no account must he let them see his doubts. The party continued clambering down slab after slab and over abrupt little walls where tired feet had to be placed with never-failing care, and at last, when it seemed they must go on and on for ever, the tents of Camp 5 loomed through the whirling snow. It was a great moment—a supreme reward to hard-pressed men who had given their all that others might gain success.

All this we did not gather at the time, for tiredness prohibits lucid explanation, but we heard enough to realise that we had witnessed the end of another great struggle in the fight for Everest.

It was questionable whether Jack should continue the descent to Camp 4, but much revived by food, drink and rest he decided to carry on, although the hour was late, nearly 4 p.m. Even the weary descent to Camp 4 was worth while with a warm and comfortable arctic tent at the end of it, occupied by supports, who would have come up that day from Camp 3, to minister to his needs and those of his worn men.

Two men, however, were too exhausted to start, and as they might dangerously hamper the party, it was agreed that they should remain overnight at Camp 5. One of them was Kipa Lama, and it was apparent that the strain had affected him mentally as well as physically. He was a quaint, good-natured little fellow; sturdy and broad, with a face that was almost always creased in a simple, confiding smile. He was somewhat of a butt

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among his comrades, who never lost an opportunity of pulling his leg. It was always good-humoured chaff, but poor little Kipa had taken it to heart as a reflection on his ability. On arriving at Camp 6, therefore, he had dumped his load with a satisfied grunt and, turning with an inquiring expression to his sahibs, had demanded a "chit"—certificate of good conduct—on the spot! He was told that he would get it later, and was hurried off down with the other porters. He must have been proud to know that he was one of eight men specially selected to establish Camp 6 and had helped to carry it 600 feet higher than in 1924. There would be no more leg pulls now.

In 1924 Norton wrote that the names of the men who carried up Camp 6 deserved to be inscribed in letters of gold. So do the names of the men in 1933. They were:¹

Ang Tarke	.	.	.	Sherpa
Da Tsering	.	.	.	Sherpa
Nima Dorje	.	.	.	Sherpa

¹ It is interesting and in some cases tragic to recall the subsequent history of these men. Several of them accompanied the ill-fated German expedition to Nanga Parbat in 1934 when four Germans and six porters lost their lives in a blizzard. Nima Dorje was one of those who perished, whilst Ang Tsering was the last survivor. The fact that he lived five days through the blizzard with no food for most of that time and scarcely any shelter, and was then able to struggle down to safety after all hope of saving him and his companions had been abandoned, speaks for itself of his extraordinary powers. The same spirit drove him and his companions up to Camp 6 on Everest and down to Camp 5 through the blizzard. Ang Tarke and Pasang accompanied Shipton and Tilman on their expedition to Nanda Devi. In 1936 several of these men again distinguished themselves on Everest, especially Ang Tarke and Rinzing. Tsering Tarke died shortly after the return of that expedition.

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Ang Tsering	.	.	.	Sherpa
Kipa Lama	.	.	.	Sherpa
Pasang	.	.	.	Bhutia
Tsering Tarke	.	.	.	Bhutia
Rinzing	.	.	.	Bhutia

With the departure of Jack and his men, Bill, Eric and I settled down to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. There were the same two tents as during the first attempt, the Meade, in which Eric and I had spent two miserable nights, and a Burn's tent of "Grenfell" cloth which was snowproof and comparatively comfortable.

Unwilling to endure again the discomfort of the Meade tent, Eric and I decided to share the Burn's tent with Bill. Unfortunately, this only held two men comfortably; with three it rivalled the Black Hole of Calcutta. Before that night I had read with cynical amusement tales of mountaineers who described crowded Alpine huts in which if one man wanted to turn over his companions had to turn with him. Now I know these tales to be true. In theory the middle man should have been the most uncomfortable, but such was not the case. The outside men, and I was one of them, were wedged against the walls of the tent, and these were rather colder than ice owing to the blast outside.

More than once that night I tried to summon up sufficient resolution to extricate myself and complete the night's rest in the other tent, which, for all its infiltrating snow, could scarcely be less comfortable. I do not know whether any of us slept. I did not. I lay there semi-comatose,

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dimly aware of the wind, but as the hours dragged on even this tired and dropped to a calm. There was no sound then save the uneven breathing of my companions and now and then a long shuddering sigh as overworked lungs found temporary relief in the scanty oxygen. Cheyne-Stokes breathing is experienced by those who climb high. The breathing becomes shorter and shorter and there is a feeling of partial suffocation until the lungs automatically obtain relief in a long, deep breath. It is by no means an inevitable process, but when it occurs it makes sleeping difficult. The fact that at lower levels it is only seen in dying persons is proof in itself of the borderline conditions on Everest.

With incredible slowness the tent lightened. Then there was a faint opalescent glow—the reflection of the sunlight stealing down Everest. Suddenly the ridge lit up and the frost-covered fabric sparkled like diamonds. The light crept down the tent, embracing it kindly. Golden at first, it soon changed to white, and the warmth of it increased every minute.

Aching and stiff, we disentangled ourselves and set about the task of preparing breakfast. And what a disagreeable task this is in a small tent at 25,700 feet. At high altitudes refuelling the body is a sordid and distasteful business. Everything seems to conspire against it being performed quickly and efficiently. The tin opener has disappeared. Everyone last saw it in a different place; it would appear to combine the ingenuity of a Maskelyne with the elusiveness of a Houdini. It is found at last in the most obvious and con-

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spicuous place of all where, of course, no one had thought to look for it. Its appearance is distasteful: a frozen mixture of various foods coats it, including, of course, sardines and condensed milk. It is driven with scant ceremony into another tin of frozen condensed milk and retaliates violently and does its best to rip the hand of its user. Curses are croaked at it. The condensed milk is frozen solid and the whole top has to be removed from the tin, which resents this process in open and savage warfare. Then the stove. There was a pressure stove now at Camp 5 in addition to the solid methylated fuel. The latter, if showing a marked disinclination to heat anything, would at least condescend to light in a reasonable time, the former required coaxing, together with an infinite patience and the diligent application of the pricker, without which no self-respecting pressure stove would dream of functioning at a high altitude; and prickers, as everyone knows, are imbued with the same coyness and self-effacement as tin openers.

Then the labour. Every labour, however small at sea-level, is magnified a hundredfold at 25,700 feet. Cooking is infinitely distasteful, but the ultimate zenith as it were of hard work is reached in extricating yourself from the clinging folds of your sleeping-bag and pulling on your windproof clothing and frozen boots. Some recommend that boots should be cherished all night in the sleeping-bag, but I have always regarded such people as theorists who have never shared a sleeping-bag with a pair of well-frozen boots. Yet, those who find such company distasteful have to pay for

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their exclusiveness in the morning. By then the boots are of granite-like consistency; they resist all attempts at coercion; nothing will console them for the indignity of being left out in the cold save a belated warm over a candle or a cooker. Picture then the spectacle of a climber grimly and carefully thawing a boot in a candle flame, turning it over and over as with a joint on a spit, like a priest engaged in some sacrificial rite of appalling significance and solemnity.

Once again the monsoon clouds had retreated, but not so far as on previous occasions. Over 5,000 feet beneath us was the Rongbuk glacier, in some parts wrinkled and seamed and in others smooth and virginal. As yet it was in cold shadow, but above it the cone of Pumori was full in the sun, and beyond this graceful mountain peak after peak was being slowly robed in brilliant light, whilst the icy edges of many a terrific crest cut like polished knives into the shadows. Far away in the west stood Gaurisankar, so often mistaken in the past for Everest, and nearer were the huge massifs of Chö-oyu and Gyachung Kang with their acres of shining snow.

At our feet was the East Rongbuk glacier extending northwards in a serene curve, and we could clearly distinguish its complicated fretwork of ice pinnacles. Beyond it the earth wearied of its turbulence and the Himalayas gradually decreased in height and steepness, like waves about a harbour mouth, sinking finally into the honey-coloured uplands of Tibet. Closer at hand the North Peak lifted massively in a tent-like crest linked with the North Col by a series of scalloped

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elliptical snow edges of extraordinary sharpness. And closer still rose the summit of Everest. It looked absurdly near and easy to climb. A walk of an hour or two should take us there and back. Such was our first impression, but when we came to look closer we were disillusioned. Here was something built on a scale contemptuous of human judgment and the human eye. We stared hard at the brown rocks in search of Wyn and Waggars. Was it possible that they would succeed in settling not only the question of the route but of gaining the summit? This was scarcely probable. A singleness of route and purpose was vital to success. I could not help feeling that their energies would have been better directed into attempting Norton's route, for Norton had unhesitatingly pronounced in its favour, and there has never been a better judge of Everest problems. There had been too much argument already as to the relative merits of the two routes, and now the strength of one party at least was to be dissipated on a reconnaissance. The clear issue was that, whereas Norton's route was practicable, it was obviously difficult and exacting and of a nature such as the mountaineer instinctively avoids.¹ The ridge, although a better route if it were practicable, was an unknown quantity. True, the first step did not look difficult, but between it and the second step the telescope had revealed a narrow and broken rock edge. The second step was a sheer cliff some 80 feet high and appeared impreg-

¹ It is axiomatic in mountaineering not to leave the crest of a ridge in favour of a traverse across a face unless an insurmountable obstacle bars progress on the ridge.

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nable to direct assault, taking into account the fact that strenuous rock climbing is impossible at 28,000 feet. If it could be climbed there was no doubt that the difficulties would be shorter and the route less dangerous than Norton's traverse. Mallory had been in favour of it and had set out with Irvine to climb it, but he had not returned and the matter was non-proven, as it is by no means certain that Odell saw them on the second step when he had that last dramatic glimpse of them between the mists.

This then was the problem, and Eric and I were now in favour of attempting something which had been seen and judged to be practicable, especially as the monsoon was likely to break at any moment. It was understood between us that unless Wyn and Wagers discovered a practicable route up the second step we should, in the event of their failing to reach the summit, go "bald-headed" for Norton's route.

Breakfast over, we said good-bye to Bill and, leaving him to his solitary vigil, began the climb to Camp 6.

As far as Camp 5 the north ridge provides nothing but the easiest of scrambling. Above the camp the rocks are easy, but in general angle appreciably steeper. We should have borne diagonally upwards at first, then doubled back to the blunt crest of the ridge, but we chose to ascend more or less directly from the camp, and this soon landed us on some awkward slabs and steep patches of frozen grit. It was a place demanding care, and it cost us both time and energy to traverse first one way and then the other to avoid

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some abrupt little walls. Two or three hundred feet higher the going improved considerably and the ridge became more defined. Both of us were climbing better than on the previous day; we were on new ground, and had the stimulating feeling that every step took us nearer to our objective. Many uncomfortable weeks, many unprofitable ascents and descents were behind us. Now we were mountaineering.

Sometimes Eric led and sometimes I. It was a settled policy with us to husband every ounce of strength; so we went slowly, our object being to keep moving rather than halt at frequent intervals. Every step was a stage in the day's work and as such demanded all the concentration we could give to it. The man who wears himself out on a mountain is he who has never learnt to walk properly. At high altitudes every detail is magnified. At an Alpine level the mountaineer in good training needs to be told that an upward step of one foot in height does not involve merely twice the effort of an upward step of six inches but several times the effort, but at high altitudes this is painfully obvious. Taking short upward steps is one of the secrets of husbanding strength on Everest, and another is an aptitude for discerning the easiest route through a wilderness of broken rocks. Any jerky movement is fatal, for jerks mean sudden outputs of energy which accelerate heart and lungs, as though the body was a high-powered racing motor-car engine with a sensitive throttle control. The summation of all these things is rhythm, and rhythm is an attitude of mind rather than any conscious physical control, in-

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cluded in which is confidence in one's companion and in oneself, a resolute refusal to be hurried by time or distance, and the elimination of all worrying thoughts.

We were climbing along the ridge at about 26,500 feet when Eric, who was leading, suddenly stopped and pointed: "There go Wyn and Wagers on the second step," he said. I joined him and we stared at the north-east ridge, whence the second step lifts its steep prow. There were certainly two dots on a small patch of snow at the foot of the step, and as my gaze concentrated on them they seemed to move. Then, simultaneously, we realised that they were two rocks. And on a snow slope above the step were two more rocks which seemed to move too when we stared hard at them.

It was a strange experience, especially in view of the fact that it was hereabout that Odell saw Mallory and Irvine for a few moments between drifting mists. Was it possible that he was similarly deceived, especially in view of the mists which may have enhanced the illusion of movement? I do not think he was deceived. His description is too detailed to allow of a mistake in the first place: most important point of all, he describes one figure as moving up to join the other. But I do not believe they were on the second step or that they climbed the step in the minute or so that he was able to watch them. The step is fully 80 feet high, and they were carrying heavy oxygen apparatus. Assuming the ascent to be possible, it could hardly take less than half an hour with or without oxygen apparatus, and Odell did not

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see them for more than a few minutes. His view was between shifting mists, and it is probable that they were traversing one of two prominent rises in the ridge some distance below the first step, or the first step itself. It would be easy to mistake the position of a party on a misty day on a complicated peak like Everest.

A little higher the ridge flattened out. A few yards to the west was a shallow hollow, really the head of an ill-defined gully, with a sloping floor of screes and boulders. Here lay a little tangle of green canvas and tent poles—the highest camp of 1924. There was something inexpressibly desolate and pathetic in the scene. Time and weather had burst and ripped the frail shelter into fragments. And those who had last slept there, Mallory and Irvine? Where were they? Would Everest yield its secret?

A few yards higher we decided to halt for a rest and a bite of food. A scarcely perceptible breeze was blowing, but it was too cold to make a halt possible on the ridge; on the lee-side, however, was a ledge, the only one we had seen, and to this we descended. It was an ideal spot, a sun-trap quite sheltered from the wind. We seated ourselves side by side, our legs dangling over the depths of a gully descending towards the East Rongbuk glacier. It was the first time we had halted in comfort above the North Col. The sun had been shining since we left Camp 5, but we had not noticed it. Now we could feel it; it penetrated our clothing and embraced our bodies; it was hot in our faces; we did not need to kick our feet together to keep the sluggish blood flow-

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ing; they became warm of their own accord. And warmth renewed interest and hope. The one thing that alloyed pleasure was the thought that presently we must force ourselves to go on.

We ate a little, not much, for our stomachs rebelled against food and eating was a duty not a pleasure, and at length summoned up the energy to continue. The cold breeze met us on the ridge, and in a few minutes we were back where we had been before both in temperature and weariness.

Above the 1924 Camp 6 some yellowish pinacles of decaying limestone bar further direct progress along the north ridge, but we avoided them easily by a diagonal upward traverse across a slope of screes and boulders. This brought us to a great stretch of broken slabs, screes and patches of snow extending to the foot of the belt of steeper sandstone slabs already designated the yellow band. There was no difficulty in ascending this ground; we had merely to pick out a route that involved the minimum of effort; but it was a dull trudge, and doubtless because of this and the absence of any interest or difficulty to occupy our minds we both began to feel the altitude as we had never felt it before. There was another factor which may have contributed to this. On the north ridge there had been a breeze, but here, on the face of the mountain, the life had gone out of the air; it was heavy, dead and charged with some subtle quality of languor and fatigue.

On the ridge we had climbed slowly but continuously, but now, however slowly we climbed, we had to halt at intervals. Yet I suppose we made progress at the rate of three or four hundred

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feet an hour—we could scarcely have done less when the going was so easy. Like all tired climbers I was beset by futile little worries. Perhaps on some rocks a few feet high there were two routes, an upper and a lower. The lower merely deferred the issue and meant in the end a steeper and more fatiguing ascent; the upper, on the contrary, meant effort all the time and was obviously better inasmuch as the effort was more uniform, yet the mind boggled at the thought of effort at all; “better defer it for a while,” it said. Yet the effort has to be made. Then would come a sudden spurt of determination, a whip-up of flagging energy, and I would take the upper route.

As soon as we came within view of the yellow band we halted. From Jack’s description we knew roughly where Camp 6 had been pitched, but it was some time before we spotted the dark-green tent on the great expanse of slabs.

Not being by any means certain as to Jack’s descending traverse route, we decided to climb directly up to it over the slabs. The camp was at the junction of two thin gullies which splayed out below in an inverted V, and one of these should afford us a convenient route. To enter it meant crossing diagonally a large bed of hard snow extending some distance along the foot of the yellow band. There were no signs of any steps made by the first party and step-cutting was necessary.

Eric and I had both cut steps at 25,000 feet on Kamet, but this was nearly 2,000 feet higher. The snow was blue and icy, indeed almost *névé*, and several swings of the axe were necessary to fashion

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a step. To me, the sound of an ice axe meeting hard snow or ice is the sweetest of all sounds on a mountainside, but here each swing of the arms set loose a few more grains in the diminishing sands of energy. Half a dozen strokes, and heart and lungs were working intolerably fast, and it was necessary to lean on the axe and gasp for breath, oblivious to all else but the vital need of oxygen. Slowly the lungs eased their exhausting pumping; the hands gripped the axe shaft again; swing, swing, swing, and again the crescendo of heart and lungs. So it went on.

The slope was not more than 100 feet long, but it seemed interminable. It was behind us at last and we found ourselves in the mouth of the gully. Here the snow was the exact antithesis of the snow we had just crossed; less exposed to wind, it had collected in soft powdery masses, and from balancing upwards on firm steps we were reduced to wallowing knee deep and even thigh deep. There was no question of ascending it, and we floundered across diagonally to the rocks of its western side. Yesterday's blizzard had covered these in loose snow, but even so they were preferable to the gully. Free of snow they would have been easy enough, but now the ledges in the outward-dipping slabs were concealed, and the snow had to be shovelled away with gloved hands at every step. There was no suggestion of tying on the rope, for there was never a single projecting rock to hitch it round and it would have been merely a nuisance.

The climbing was difficult, far more difficult than we had anticipated. It occurred to us both that at sea-level the ascent would have been

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reckoned as difficult, but now I am not so sure; on Everest, difficulty cannot be dissociated from tiredness and altitude. We were wondering dully whether we had missed the camp, when we clambered over a slab and saw the tent a few feet above us perched on a slope of scree. We, or perhaps only myself, as Eric had little voice left, let out a croak of relief. We could have continued had the need been great, but "sufficient unto the day"—we were dog tired.

There was no one to welcome us; Wyn and Waggars had not yet returned. Somewhere they were toiling, perhaps up, perhaps down. Had they reached the summit? When would they return? These questions could wait. We were too tired to do anything but attend to our own immediate needs, and of these the greatest were rest and a hot drink. The first was easily satisfied, and unlacing the tent flaps we sank down on the sleeping-bags within; and there we lay some time, too tired to move. Finally, we bestirred ourselves sufficiently to prepare the second. At this height the solid methyated gave off little warmth; the blue flickering flames seemed cowed and oppressed by cold and altitude, and a full hour elapsed before they had melted enough snow to lubricate our dried-up throats and leather-like tongues, and then it was only a cup of luke-warm tea apiece.

Suddenly we heard the scrape of boot-nails and a few moments later were welcoming Wyn and Waggars. We did not need to ask them whether they had reached the summit; their bearing was not that of successful men.

The first thing Wyn did was to fling down an

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ice axe at the entrance of the tent. "Found this," he said. "Must have belonged to Mallory or Irvine."

They squashed themselves into the tent and seated themselves with the thankful sighs of tired men. We asked no questions but set about preparing a hot drink.

When they had rested a little we had their story. Wyn told it; and though for a tired man he was amazingly coherent and intelligible, we had frequently to interrupt him: 27,400 feet does not conduce to clear thinking or description. Yet in the end his story was clear in all its essential details.

Following a miserable night, they had risen at 4.30 and, after a very poor meal and the usual exhausting ritual of thawing frozen boots and pulling on windproof clothing, left the tent shortly after 5.30. At this hour the sun had not yet risen above the north-east ridge and the cold was so great that they feared frostbite. They traversed the slabs of the yellow band diagonally, gradually gaining height. An hour later, when the sun appeared, they halted and Wagers removed his boots and massaged his numbed feet. Fortunately, there was little or no wind, otherwise both must have been dangerously frostbitten.

Not far beyond this halting-place Wyn discovered the ice axe which can only have belonged to Mallory or Irvine. It was lying on the slabs, which are hereabouts inclined at an angle of 35° – 40° , unsupported by crack or ledge, and dependent on friction alone for its lodgment.

For the time being the axe was left where it

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was found and they continued traversing to the foot of the first step. As we had suspected, it appeared possible to avoid climbing the two towers which compose the step by a traverse to the north of them. The ridge could then be gained above the step. But the objection to this was that the 200 yards long section of ridge crest between the first step and second step, a jagged saw blade of rock with abrupt gaps 15 to 20 feet deep, looked difficult. The labour of traversing such an edge at 28,000 feet would be immense, and a gap 15 feet deep, if the sides of it are vertical and unclimbable, is sufficient to stop a party at a much lower elevation. Norton and Somervell had much the same view in 1924, and were so impressed by the difficulty of the ridge and the second step, that they continued traversing the yellow band in the hope of circumventing the difficulties. So with Wyn and Wagers.

Their idea was to climb directly upwards to the foot of the second step, thus short-circuiting the difficult section of the ridge, and with this in view they continued to traverse along the top of the yellow band. But the further they went the steeper and more difficult were the rocks above them. The telescope had revealed a chimney which Wyn had noted as a possible line, but this they were unable to find. The sole possibility was an oblique gully, which appeared to cut through the steep belt of rock to a point above the second step. They reached the foot of this at 10 a.m. and tied on the rope for the first time. Wyn then tried to lead up it, but he found himself in one of the shallow scoops peculiar to the limestone, of

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which the rocks hereabouts are composed; there were no clean-cut edges, only round knobs affording the poorest of holds, especially as they were covered in snow. The climbing was very steep, and at 28,000 feet, where gymnastics are impossible, and the climber cannot accomplish anything in the nature of a strenuous arm pull, it proved hopeless.

Four hours had flown and the net result was that careful examination and a determined attempt had disclosed the apparent impracticability of the ridge route. We could only speculate as to what the result would have been had they gained the ridge immediately above the first step. The ridge *may* be practicable; the point is, can a party be spared in the future to prove this? They will have no time or strength left for an alternative route should it prove impossible.

Having failed to reach the foot of the second step, Wyn and Waggers were now committed to the sole alternative, Norton and Somervell's route; so they continued along the top of the yellow band with the steep rock band of the second step above them, and presently came to the head of the great couloir. This they crossed, finding like Norton before them treacherously loose snow in the bed of the couloir. On the rocks beyond, where the yellow band surges outwards in a buttress separating the main couloir from a subsidiary couloir, they encountered steeper and more difficult climbing. And the conditions were bad; the snow of yesterday's blizzard had accumulated on the sloping ledges and in every crack and chimney. Furthermore, Waggers was tired: he thought he

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might be able to continue for another hour, not longer. Lastly, the time was 12.30 p.m. Even had conditions and the strength of the party rendered the summit accessible, it would have been impossible to return to camp by nightfall, and for exhausted men benighted on Everest there is only one ending.

On the way back they again examined the possibilities of reaching the foot of the second step, but they were too tired to carry out their intention of gaining the ridge above the first step. Finally, Waggars managed to reach the ridge below the first step immediately above the ice axe,¹ whence he gazed down the stupendous ice slopes of the south-east face. In this connection it is interesting to note that ice is plastered to the south side of the second step, and it is just possible that the step can be avoided by an upward traverse on this side, though whether a climber can cut steps in an ice slope of 60°, or more, as the angle would appear to be, at 28,000 feet is another unsolved problem of Everest. There are many problems, and each may use up a party, perhaps a whole expedition.

The full story, as I have given it here, Eric and I did not hear until afterwards, but we heard enough to convince us that we must go "all out" for Norton's route and not dissipate our energy between it and the ridge route, as Wyn and Waggars had so unfortunately had to do in their capacity as a reconnaissance party.

We listened to their story with that apathy peculiar to high altitudes. Even the finding of the

¹ Wyn Harris left his own in place of it.

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ice axe, one of the most dramatic discoveries in the history of mountaineering, failed to evoke more than a passing interest.

By dint of a long and miserable effort the methylated cooker mustered sufficient energy to melt some snow. There was no time to heat up a good drink, for time was getting on, and it was essential that Wyn and Wagers should be off down to Camp 5. So contenting themselves with some lukewarm liquid they gathered themselves together and prepared to descend. It must have cost them more than an ordinary effort to face the weary descent, but what would the position have been if they had been too tired to descend, with one small tent at Camp 6, capable of accommodating only two men, and that uncomfortably? And what if there had been a sudden blizzard to make the descent impossible?

A minute or so later, I took a photograph of them; they were following Jack's downward route; their heads were bowed, and they moved in that heavy dragging way peculiar to tired men.

After their departure Eric and I did our best to make ourselves comfortable. Comfort was the only thing in our minds; all else, all plans and thoughts for the morrow could take care of themselves. And there was little enough comfort to be had in that small tent. No platform had been available for it, and one had been constructed of stones, but the party had been too tired to do this efficiently or to level the floor of the platform, and the result was that the tent canted outwards, whilst sundry large and sharp stones beneath the thin

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sewn-in ground sheet reminded us forcibly of the hardness of things in general and of Everest in particular. In addition to this, the outer side of the tent was improperly supported and projected beyond the edge of the platform. This reduced the effective width and added greatly to the discomfort.

I do not remember that there was any discussion as to who should have the upper and who the lower position, I only know I found myself in the upper. The net result was that I spent the night rolling at frequent intervals on to Eric, whilst Eric spent the night being rolled on at frequent intervals by me.

Before trying to sleep, we cooked some supper. There was a little store of provisions, enough for three days, perhaps four at a pinch, and ten or a dozen tins of solid methylated fuel. We placed the cooker between us as we lay in our sleeping-bags and investigated the provisions. There was condensed milk, sugar, drinking chocolate, tabloid tea, "Ovaltine," café-au-lait, Brand's meat extracts, sardines, cod roes, biscuits and sweets.

Hot drinks came before everything else and these the wretched little cooker resolutely refused to produce. At 27,000 feet water boils at a temperature many degrees below the boiling-point at sea-level, but not once during our stay at Camp 6 did we manage to get a boiling drink, and we had to content ourselves with lukewarm concoctions. Our language regarding the solid methylated cooker is unprintable, but it is far too much of an effort to be angry at 27,400 feet.

Our supper consisted principally of Brand's beef

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extract which was frozen solid and had to be thawed out before it could be eaten. We had no desire for solids—indeed, no desire for food of any kind; eating was a duty. Drinking was a different matter. Our bodies were desiccated by the intensely dry atmosphere and craved for moisture which also served as a palliative for sore and congested throats.

Our meal ended with *café-au-lait* and condensed milk which was voted superb. Then, before settling down for the night, we unlaced the tent flaps and glanced outside; everything now depended on the weather.

The evening was calm, the calmest we had known above the North Col. The smooth, outward-dipping slabs glowed in the fast setting sun and, at an immense distance beneath, clouds concealed the valleys and lesser peaks. There was nothing to obstruct the tremendous prospect. Seen from Everest, great peaks that dominate the climber as he toils along the East Rongbuk glacier, and up the slopes of the North Col, show like insignificant ripples at the base of a great ocean roller. Even the North Peak was but a stepping-stone to quick-footed vision.

It was cold. Space, the air we breathed, the yellow rocks were deadly cold. There was something ultimate, passionless and eternal in this cold. It came to us as a single constant note from the depths of space; we stood on the very boundary of life and death.

The night spread out of the east in a great flood, quenching the red sunlight in a single minute.

We wriggled by breathless degrees deep into our

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sleeping-bags. Our sole thought was of comfort; We were not alive to the beauty or the grandeur of our position; we did not reflect on the splendour of our elevation. A regret I shall always have is that I did not muster up the energy to spend a minute or two star gazing. One peep I did make between the tent flaps into the night, and I remember dimly an appalling wealth of stars, not pale and remote as they appear when viewed through the moisture-laden air of lower levels, but brilliant points of electric blue fire standing out almost stereoscopically. It was a sight an astronomer would have given much to see, and here were we lying dully in our sleeping-bags concerned only with the importance of keeping warm and comfortable.

There is one blessing, if of a negative nature, in high altitude. The physical and mental processes are so slowed down by lack of oxygen that a sleepless night does not drag as interminably as it does at sea-level. The climber, though awake, lies semi-comatose, scarcely heeding time's passage. The one thing that stirs his sluggish mental processes into activity is acute discomfort. At times we *were* acutely uncomfortable, and this was due, as already mentioned, to the uneven sloping platform beneath us and the ineffective width of the tent. Between spasms of rapid breathing, sometimes so acute as to amount to a feeling of suffocation, I would drop off into a light slumber only to roll on top of Eric and awake with a resentful elbow in the small of my back. Then we would curse bitterly, not each other but a common fate.

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We slept with heads buttressed high by wads of rucksacks, boots, rope and windproof clothing, as this aids breathing at high altitudes. Balaclava helmets protected our heads, and only eyes, mouths and noses were exposed. We were reasonably warm and I felt myself to be resting in spite of my sleeplessness.

The night was calm until shortly before dawn. Then, for the first time, a gust of wind tugged at the tent. It was succeeded by another and stronger gust. By dawn a gale was blowing.

We had planned to start at about 5.30 a.m., but it was impossible; to have left the tent even for a few minutes would have meant certain and severe frostbite. It was terribly depressing to lie thus, our hopes destroyed in a single hour, but at the same time I could not suppress a feeling of relief that I did not have to endure the exertion of turning out of my sleeping-bag and of struggling into my windproof suit and boots. Ours was not the disappointment of men eager and willing to set off for an unclimbed summit; we only felt that an unpleasant duty had been frustrated. I was tired too, and needed additional rest to recuperate from the exertions of yesterday. Eric felt differently about this. He told me afterwards that so far from recuperating, his strength deteriorated steadily during the day and that his chance of doing himself justice vanished when we were prevented from starting. This physical difference between us crystallised one of Everest's greatest problems—that of two men setting out for the summit both at the top of their form.

As daylight increased snow began to fall; we

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could hear the familiar yet ever hateful patter, swish and lash of it on the tent.

We breakfasted. The wretched business of having to replenish the saucepan with snow was scarcely compensated for by the lukewarm cup of tea apiece eventually produced by the cooker, yet it served to stimulate a discussion of the position as we lay side by side in our sleeping-bags.

If the weather improved would the summit be possible on the morrow? The new snow, even though much of it blew off the mountain as it fell, would inevitably accumulate in every sheltered place, particularly in the vicinity of the great couloir. Neither of us voiced the thought to the other, but we knew that unless a miracle happened we were as good as beaten. However, we could at least go as far as possible when the weather mended. But would the weather mend? At the back of our minds was always the thought of the monsoon. At any moment now it might burst on Everest in full force and snow fall for days on end. What then? We had food for another three days, four at a pinch, maybe even five with the strictest rationing, but there was only fuel for another two days, reckoning the use of one tin of solid methylated per meal and three meals a day. Food is useless at 27,400 feet without fuel. Something to warm the stomach is the first essential; without warmth a man cannot live for long; he is too near the point where the oxygen he breathes is insufficient to counteract the cooling of the body by the cold air.¹ For how many days a man can live at 27,400 feet in a small tent supplied with

¹ See footnote, page 133.

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ample food and fuel is a matter for conjecture. I should say not longer than a week. In the event of a continuous snowstorm we should naturally try to descend, but I do not believe a descent from Camp 6 is possible through deep snow even in fair weather; the slabs of the yellow band would be impassable.

A heavy snowfall is a risk the climber will always have to face high on Everest, and it militates against a camp on the final pyramid to the west of the great couloir. Here, it needs but a sprinkling of snow to render descent impossible, or at least desperately dangerous, and conditions which do not prohibit a descent from a point as high as the ledge beneath the first step at nearly 28,000 feet, on which we had planned originally to pitch Camp 6, may well make impossible descent from a more westerly point. Yet, whether or not a camp should be pitched on the pyramid may have to be considered. The main point is that Everest cannot be climbed by any route or method, without risks far in excess of ordinary mountaineering risks, and the problem a mountaineer will always have to face is whether or not he is entitled to take risks overstepping the traditional standards of safety in mountaineering in order to gain success. My own belief is that the man who climbs on the upper part of Everest does overstep these standards, and that owing to the unique nature of the problem his conceptions of what is justifiable and what is unjustifiable cannot be based on Alpine standards of safety and danger. One thing only delimits reasoned adventure from unreasoned recklessness—the duty owed by

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an expedition to its porters. So long as these men are employed their welfare must always determine the manner of climbing Everest, and this helps the climber to gauge his duty to his comrades, and those who anxiously await his safe return.

By the afternoon a full-dress blizzard was raging. We were far too lethargic to be alarmed at the possibility of being marooned permanently. Indeed, our discussion of the possibilities already mentioned was purely academic and on a curiously detached and impersonal plane, almost as though we were scientists discussing an immature experiment, yet our instincts were animal rather than human, inasmuch as we were concerned only with the present, and our complaints were against trivial things which loomed out of all proportion to the possible events of the future. It is probable that we remember each other's grouses without remembering our own—a happy dispensation. Eric had developed a “complex” relating to fresh food. All through the expedition he had been a protagonist of fresh food. The toughest and most indigestible piece of gristle from a Tibetan sheep of Marathon-like build was to him preferable to the most succulent product of Messrs. Fortnum & Mason that came out of a tin. Now in a hoarse, scarcely audible voice, he enlarged on the lack of fresh food at Camp 6. “Oh, for a few dozen eggs!” was his constant plaint; or “This ——— tinned muck” he would whisper bitterly. I could sympathise, at all events, with his craving for eggs. Certainly an omelet, nicely fried and well buttered with a dash of *fines herbes*, would have gone down well, and one of those huge bilberry

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omelets known as "palatschinken" in the Tyrol would have been a welcome change from the frozen corpses of sardines in congealed oil.

As I felt I ought to contribute a grouse of my own, I conceived a more and more bitter hatred for a sharp stone beneath the tent. This had been placed at the exact point most convenient for my hip bone. I made a few futile tugs and jabs at it, but it was evidently a large, well-wedged stone and refused to budge. My remarks concerning it were rich in those hyphens and asterisks whereby the deserving printer tries to conceal, and yet, paradoxically, to reveal the niceties of the English language.

Towards evening there was a sudden gleam of light. We looked outside. The clouds had parted, revealing the rapidly declining sun. Its pale light accentuated rather than mitigated the bleakness of the prospect. The wind was still volleying across Everest, raising spirals of loose snow which hurried in an endless procession across the slabs. Every crack and cranny held its salt-like snow and only the more exposed slabs had been swept clear. In between the flying rags of mist the sky was green, not the warm green of grass and trees, but a cruel feline green utterly unmerciful. Yet the sight of it rekindled a spark of hope. If we could do nothing else on the morrow we might once and for all dispose of the problem of the ridge route and the second step.

The wind was moderating as we prepared our meagre supper, and only an occasional squall worried the tent. The night was no more comfortable than the last, and to describe it would be to

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repeat a catalogue of discomforts. Now and again would come a fierce squall succeeded by a period of calm, then another squall. But as the night wore on the calm intervals lengthened and the squalls were less violent. Perhaps, after all, we should be able to attempt the summit. In the conditions we could not hope to succeed; we could only do our best.

CHAPTER XV

THE ASSAULT

THE SKY WAS CLEAR AT DAYBREAK. WE HAD resolved overnight to leave at five, but a rising wind and intense cold made this impossible. Cold we could have faced, but the addition of wind is too much for mere flesh and blood on Everest.

Matters appeared hopeless until an hour later when the wind suddenly fell to a complete calm. And it did not return. We listened expectantly for the hateful rush and tug of it, but the calm persisted.

Breakfast eaten, we extricated ourselves foot by foot from our sleeping-bags and with much labour and panting pulled on our windproof suits.

Our boots might have been carved out of stone, and they glistened and sparkled inside with the frozen moisture from our feet. I made a vain attempt to soften mine over a candle, but it was useless, and somehow or other I thrust my feet into them, pausing at intervals to beat my bare hands together, or stuff them into my pockets.

We donned every stitch of clothing we possessed. I wore a Shetland vest, a thick flannel shirt, a

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heavy camel-hair sweater, six light Shetland pull-overs, two pairs of long Shetland pants, a pair of flannel trousers, and over all a silk-lined "Grenfell" windproof suit. A Shetland balaclava and another helmet of "Grenfell" cloth protected my head, and my feet were encased in four pairs of Shetland socks and stockings. Gloves are always a problem on Everest, and the ideal glove that is warm yet flexible and will adhere to rocks has still to be designed; in this instance, a pair of woollen fingerless gloves inside a pair of South African lambskin gloves, also fingerless, kept my hands moderately warm.

A slab of Kendal mint cake apiece sufficed for food. It was a mistake not to provide ourselves with more food, but our repugnance for it had been still further intensified during our enforced stay at Camp 6. Apart from this we carried a length of light climbing line, whilst my little "Etui" camera accompanied me as usual.¹

At seven we emerged from the tent and laced the flaps behind us. It was sadly obvious that Eric was far below his usual form. He had eaten less than I since we had arrived at the Camp, and now he complained of stomach pains, and asked me to go slowly—a request I might have made myself had he been fitter.

A shallow snow-filled gully took us diagonally upwards and across the yellow band for the best part of 100 feet. There was no difficulty, but every minute or two we had to halt and lean on our ice axes gasping for breath.

¹ This, complete with one film pack, weighs one and a quarter pounds. It takes $3\frac{1}{2}$ inch by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inch photographs.

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The gully petered out into a great expanse of slabs. Again there was no difficulty; advance was merely a matter of careful balance and choice of the easiest route; yet the angle as a whole on the yellow band is such that a slip would probably end in a fatal slide, especially as the climber would have little strength left to stop himself. Fortunately, our broad, lightly nailed boots gripped the sandstone well. The snow of yesterday's blizzard had been blown from many of the slabs, but here and there where it had accumulated on the shelving ledges we had to tread circumspectly.

Though we left the camp an hour and a half later than Wyn and Waggars had done, the cold was still intense and there was little warmth in the sun which was just peeping over the north-east ridge.

The first and most lasting impression of the climber on Everest will always be the bleak and inhospitable nature of the great mountain. On the yellow band no projecting crags, ridges or buttresses stimulate the interest or the imagination; there is nothing level and the climber must tread a series of outward-shelving ledges where the rope is useless to him. Never have I seen a more utterly desolate mountainside. And above, still a weary way above, was the summit pyramid set squarely at the end of this vast rocky roof; a last tremendous challenge to our failing strength.

Traversing, and ascending slightly, we made for the foot of the first step which, from the moment we emerged from the initial gully, appeared close at hand. Its shape reminded me

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in some curious way of the summit of a Lake District hill which I had climbed one dewy Spring morning before breakfast to "work up an appetite." It had taken me an hour to scale 2,300 feet of turfy bracken-clad fellsides, and now with eleven hours of daylight in hand I was doubtful whether we had the time or strength to climb and descend 1,600 feet. Yet, I was going better than I had expected. Exercise was loosening my cramped and stiffened limbs, and for the first time since arriving at Camp 6 I was conscious of warm blood flowing vigorously in my veins. But, unhappily, this was not the case with Eric. He was going steadily, but very slowly, and it was more than ever plain that there was something wrong with him.

Not far from the first step we crossed an almost level platform covered in small scree, a possible site for a future camp, then traversed almost horizontally. We were immediately below the step when I heard an exclamation behind me. Turning, I saw that Eric had stopped and was leaning heavily on his ice axe. Next moment he sank down into a sitting position.

Many times during the march across Tibet we had discussed what to do in the event of one man of a party of two being unable to continue, and we had agreed that unless he was exhausted and unable to return alone safely his companion should carry on alone, in which decision he would be supported by the expedition and its leader. It was an expedition maxim that no man must go on till he reached a point of complete exhaustion, and Eric was far too good a mountaineer to do

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this. The saving grace in high-altitude climbing is that there is a point at which a man cannot continue to ascend but can still descend relatively easily and quite safely. This is Nature's automatic safety check.¹

I asked Eric whether he felt fit enough to return to camp safely. He replied unhesitatingly, "Yes," and added that he would follow slowly. This last, though I did not know it at the time, was inspired by generosity. He had no intention of proceeding further and merely said that he would to encourage me and relieve me from all anxiety as to his safety. It was another example of that good comradeship which will one day take men to the summit of Everest.

Leaving him seated on a rock I continued. I looked back after a minute or so, but he had as yet made no move.

There was never any doubt as to the best route.

¹ I am convinced that this automatic check rules out the possibility of a man collapsing suddenly near the summit of Everest. Such a disturbing possibility has been mentioned as the result of tests carried out by the R.A.F. in a decompression chamber. These tests revealed that at a pressure equivalent to a height of 28,000-30,000 feet many men faint suddenly and without warning. Such tests, however, are artificial inasmuch as they make no allowance for acclimatisation, and I do not believe they have any real bearing on the Everest problem. I cannot for an instant believe that under natural conditions nature acts in so arbitrary a fashion. Her processes lead slowly and unmistakably to a logical conclusion. It is only artificial conditions that she resents. Perhaps this is one of the deep-seated reasons why many Everest climbers abhor oxygen apparatus. There is something artificial, unnatural and therefore dangerous in its use on Everest. The argument that it is necessary in high flying, mines, etc., etc., cannot hold water inasmuch as such conditions are unnatural, men not being endowed with the capabilities of birds or moles, which do not, incidentally, require oxygen apparatus to sustain them.

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The crest of the north-east ridge, leading to the foot of the second step, was sharp, jagged and obviously difficult. As for the second step, now almost directly above me, it *looked* utterly impregnable, and I can only compare it to the sharp bow of a battle cruiser. Norton's route alone seemed to offer any chance of success, and it follows the yellow band beneath a sheer wall to the head of the great couloir.

At first there was no difficulty and a series of sloping ledges at the top of the yellow band took me round a corner and out of sight of Eric. Then came a patch of snow perhaps 30 yards wide. There was no avoiding it except by a descent of nearly 100 feet, but fortunately the snow was not the evil floury stuff I had expected, but had been well compacted by the wind; indeed, such hard snow that step-cutting was necessary.

Step-cutting at nearly 28,000 feet is a fatiguing operation, and the axe seemed unconscionably heavy and unready to do its work. In the Alps one powerful stroke with the adze would have fashioned a step, but sudden spurts of exertion are to be avoided at 28,000 feet, and I preferred the alternative of several light, short strokes. I must have looked like an old hen grubbing for worms, but even so I had to cease work and puff hard after making each step.

High altitudes promote indecision. Projecting through the snow was a rock and at first sight it seemed a good foot-hold. Then I thought it was too sloping and that I had better cut to one side of it. But I had no sooner changed my mind when I decided that perhaps after all it could be

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used as a foot-hold and would save me a step or two. I must have spent a minute or two turning this ridiculous little point over in my mind before doing what was the obvious thing—avoiding it. It is curious how small problems encountered during a great undertaking can assume an importance out of all proportion to their true worth.

When I had crossed the snow I again glanced back, but there was no sign of Eric following me, and I continued on my solitary way.

Contrary to accepted mountaineering practice, I found that the easiest as well as the safest method of traversing the slabs was to keep the ice axe in the outside hand as there were always little cracks and crannies to put it in. It was a third leg to me and an invaluable companion throughout the whole of the day.

Beyond the snow patch the slabs were covered here and there with loose, powdery snow. This had to be kicked or scraped away before I dared stand on the outward-sloping ledges. Progress was slow, though steady, and as I advanced and saw the final pyramid appear above the band of rocks beneath which I was traversing, there came to me for the first time that day a thrill of excitement and hope. I was going well now, better than when I had parted from Eric, and for a moment there seemed a chance of success.

The bed of the great couloir was hidden, but a subsidiary couloir and a buttress separating it from the great couloir were full in view. Both were sheltered from the wind and as a result were still heavily plastered with the snow of yesterday's blizzard. My hopes were dashed as I gazed at the

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buttress. It was considerably steeper than the rocks I was traversing, and snow filled every crack and was piled deeply on every sloping ledge. Was it climbable in such a condition? In the Alps perhaps, but not at 28,000 feet by a man nearing the limit of his strength. And the subsidiary couloir? Even supposing the traverse of the buttress proved practicable, what kind of snow should I find in this narrow cleft? Most likely unstable powder affording no certain footing and impeding every movement. True, it might be possible to avoid it by climbing the rocks at one side, but these, in their turn, were mostly snow-covered.

Instinctively I looked for an alternative. Could I climb directly upwards to a point above the second step and attack the final pyramid without having to continue this long, wearisome and unprofitable traverse? The wall rose above me like a sea cliff, in places it overhung, and every hold, every wrinkle and crack held its quota of snow. There was no visible break in it until the buttress where there was a gap, possibly the point reached by Norton in 1924, which might prove a feasible alternative to the subsidiary couloir. At all events direct ascent was impossible. One thing alone gave me hope: once the subsidiary couloir had been climbed and the rock band passed there seemed every reason to suppose that the principal difficulties were behind. I could see the face of the final pyramid and it did not look difficult. This was a scree slope at the base of it and higher a slope of light-coloured boulders. Energy alone would be required to surmount it. Of course it may hold its surprises, for Everest will remain

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a stubborn opponent to the last; but I feel confident that once the rock band is below, the change from difficult and dangerous climbing to safe and easy climbing will inspire the climber to outlast fatigue and altitude over the remaining 600 feet to the summit.

The angle of the yellow band steepened gradually as I approached the great couloir. In general direction the ledges were parallel with the band, but they were not always continuous, and once or twice I had to retrace my steps for a yard or two and seek an alternative route. But the climbing was never difficult—it required only unfailing attention to the planting of each foot on the sloping ledges, especially when these were masked by loose snow.

Presently the bed of the great couloir became visible. It was shallow enough not to necessitate any steep descent into it, and was filled with snow, perhaps 30 to 40 feet wide, which ended beneath the rock band. Several hundred feet lower was a pitch of unknown height, beneath which the couloir widened out into a small hanging glacier, then fell steeply towards the Rongbuk glacier, a total height from my position of about 8,000 feet.

It was a savage place. Beyond was the steep and snowy buttress separating me from the subsidiary couloir, and hemming me in above was the unrelenting band of rock, and higher still the final pyramid, a weary distance away, cutting aloofly into the blue.

I approached the couloir along a ledge which bent round a steep little corner. This ledge was

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comfortably wide until it came to the corner, then it narrowed until it was only a few inches broad. As far as the corner it was easy going, but to turn the corner I had to edge along, my face to the mountain, in a crab-like fashion. The rocks above projected awkwardly, but it was not a place that would have caused a second's hesitation on an Alpine climb. One step only was needed to take me round the corner. This step I faked. The balance was too critical. With arms spread-eagled above me I sought for steadying hand-holds. They were not essential; balance alone should have sufficed, but I felt I could not manage without them. I could find none; every wrinkle in the rocks sloped outwards. For a few moments I stood thus like a man crucified, while my heart bumped quickly and my lungs laboured for oxygen, and there flashed through my mind the possibility of a backward topple into the couloir—an interminable slide into belated oblivion.

I retired a few yards, and apostrophised myself as a fool. I knew that the traverse was possible, and if Eric had been there I should not have hesitated. Being alone made all the difference.

I tried again, and once more found myself in the spread-eagled position but without the courage to take the one step that would have placed me in safety round the corner.

The only alternative was a ledge about 20 feet below. I was loath to lose even 20 feet of height, but there was nothing for it but to descend.

The slabs separating me from the ledge were reasonably rough, and though there were no very

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definite holds there were wrinkles and folds. For the rest friction should serve. Facing outwards and sitting down I lowered myself gingerly off the ledge on the palms of my hands. The friction was even better than I had hoped for, and the seat of my trousers almost sufficed by itself to maintain me in position without the additional support of the palms of my hands. There was no awkward corner in the lower ledge; it was wide and honest, and though it sloped outwards and supported a bank of snow three or four feet deep, it brought me without difficulty to the snowy bed of the couloir.

Wyn and Wagers had found the same loose, disagreeable snow in the couloir as had Norton in 1924, *but I suspect that they traversed the upper ledge and so crossed higher than I.* The snow at my level, as a tentative forward dig with the ice axe revealed, had been hardened by the wind and step-cutting was again necessary.

One step, then a pause to gasp, while the snow at my feet and the rocks beyond swam uncertainly before me. Then another step and another bout of gasping. The snow was very hard and the angle of the great couloir at this point fully 50°. About a dozen steps—I was across at last.

Next, how to traverse the buttress? I must climb almost straight up it for about fifty feet before continuing more or less horizontally towards the subsidiary couloir.

The rocks were steep and snow had accumulated on them untouched as yet by the wind. How had the wind swept the snow in the couloir hard and left the slabs at this side unaffected?

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When these slabs are snow-free they are probably not much more difficult than the slabs to the east of the great couloir. There are numerous ledges, and though the general angle is appreciably steeper, there is no necessity for anything but balance climbing, and I confidently believe no insuperable obstacle will prevent the climber from reaching the subsidiary couloir. But now snow had accumulated deeply on the shelving ledges and it was the worst kind of snow, soft like flour, loose like granulated sugar and incapable of holding the feet in position. As I probed it with my axe, I knew at once that the game was up. So far the climbing had been more dangerous than difficult; now it was both difficult and dangerous, a fatal combination on Everest. The only thing I could do was to go as far as possible, always keeping one eye on the weather and the other on the strength I should need to retreat safely.

The weather at all events was fair. In the shelter of the buttress and the wall beyond the subsidiary couloir there was not a breath of wind and the sun shone powerfully—too powerfully, for it seemed to sap my strength and my resolution. I was a prisoner, struggling vainly to escape from a vast hollow enclosed by dungeon-like walls. Wherever I looked hostile rocks frowned down on my impotent strugglings, and the wall above seemed almost to overhang me with its dark strata set one upon the other, an embodiment of static, but pitiless, force. The final pyramid was hidden; if only I were on it, away from this dismal place with its unrelenting slabs. The climber who

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wins across the slabs to the final pyramid must conquer a sickness of spirit as well as a weariness of body.

With both arms at breast-high level I began shovelling the snow away before me; it streamed down the couloir behind me with a soft swishing noise. Several minutes elapsed before a sloping ledge was disclosed, then I heaved myself up, until first one knee, and then the other, were on it. In this position, like a suppliant before a priest, I had to remain while my lungs, intolerably accelerated by the effort, heaved for oxygen. Then with another effort I stood cautiously upright.

More snow had to be cleared before I could tread a smaller ledge on the slab above; then, to my relief, came a step unattended by this prodigious effort of clearing away snow. But relief is short-lived on Everest and the ledge that followed was covered several feet deep in snow bevelled into a steep bank, yet without the slightest cohesion.

Presently I had to stop, as apart from the need to rest overstressed heart and lungs, immersing my arms in the snow brought such numbness to my hands, gloved though they were, that I feared I might let slip my ice axe.

So slow and exhausting was the work of clearing the snow that I began to rely on feel alone. That is to say, when I could I trusted my foot to find holds beneath the snow rather than clear the snow away from the slabs until I could see the holds. I realised full well the danger of this, and whenever possible used my ice-axe pick as an extra support

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by jamming it into cracks. This last precaution undoubtedly saved me from catastrophe. There was one steeply shelving slab deeply covered with soft snow into which I sank to the knees, but my first exploring foot discovered a knob beneath it. This seemed quite firm and, reaching up with my axe, I wedged the pick of it half an inch or so into a thin crack. Then, cautiously, I raised my other foot on to the knob, at the same time transferring my entire weight to my front foot. My rear foot was joining my front foot when the knob, without any warning, suddenly broke away. For an instant, both feet slid outwards, and my weight came on the ice axe; next moment I had recovered my footing and discovered another hold. It happened so quickly that my sluggish brain had no time to register a thrill of fear; I had acted purely instinctively and the incident was over almost before I knew it had occurred. I did not even feel scared afterwards as I was climbing now in a curiously detached, impersonal frame of mind. It was almost as though one part of me stood aside and watched the other struggle on. Lack of oxygen and fatigue are responsible for this dulling of the mental faculties, but principally lack of oxygen. It is a dangerous state of mind and comparable to the mental reactions of a drunken man in charge of a car. He may believe that his judgment is unimpaired, even that he can drive more skilfully than usual; in point of fact, as statistics and the police court news reveal, he is much more prone to an accident in this condition.

Just before crossing the great couloir I had looked at my watch; it was 10 a.m. Now I looked

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again. An hour had passed, and I had made about fifty feet of height, not more. At least 300 feet of difficult rocks, all deeply snow-covered, remained to be climbed, before easier ground on the final pyramid was reached. Perhaps I could do another hour or two's work, but what was the use of it? I should only exhaust myself completely and not have the strength left to return.

I shovelled away the floury snow until I had made a space on which I could stand, though I did not dare to sit.

I was high up on the buttress separating the great couloir from the subsidiary couloir. Above me was the band of rock beneath which I had been, and was still, traversing. It looked impregnable except where it was breached by the subsidiary couloir, and the place already mentioned a few yards to the east of this couloir. For the rest, it is Everest's greatest defence, and stretches unbroken across the north face of the mountain. The striated limestone rocks composing it actually overhang in places, and the section above the great couloir reminded me of the well-known pitch in the Central Gully, on Lliwedd, in North Wales.

It is possible, indeed probable, that weariness and altitude distorted my judgment, but there are two things I believe to be true. Firstly, that Norton's route is practicable, and that when the "tiles," as he calls the slabs, are free of snow, they can be traversed without excessive difficulty to the subsidiary couloir, and this can be climbed on to the face of the final pyramid. Secondly,

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that it is not a practicable route when snow covers the slabs. But there is no doubt that even in the best conditions this part of the climb will tax a climber's powers to the uttermost. The unrelenting exposure of the slabs, dependence on the friction of boot nails for hours on end, added to the physical and mental weariness and lethargy due to altitude, will require something more than strength and skill if they are to be countered successfully. The summit was just in view over the rock band. It was only 1,000 feet above me, but an æon of weariness separated me from it. Bastion on bastion and slab on slab, the rocks were piled in tremendous confusion, their light-yellow edges ghostlike against the deep-blue sky. From the crest a white plume of mist flowed silently away, like unending volcanic steam, but where I stood there was not a breath of wind and the sun blazed into the hollow with an intense fierceness, yet without warming the cold air. Clouds were gathering, but they were thousands of feet below me. Between them, I could see the Rongbuk glacier, a pure white in its uppermost portion, then rugged and uneven where it was resolved into a multitude of séracs and, lower still, a gigantic muddle of moraines as though all the navvies in the world had been furiously excavating to no logical purpose. Beyond it, the Rongbuk valley stretched northwards towards the golden hills of Tibet, and I could make out the Rongbuk monastery, a minute cluster of minute buildings, yet distinct in every detail through the brilliantly clear atmosphere. With this one exception, I remember no details. My position was too high,

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my view too vast, my brain too fatigued to register detail. There was nothing visible to challenge my elevation. The earth was so far beneath, it seemed impossible I could ever regain it. The human brain must needs be divinely inspired to comprehend such a vista, and mine was tied to a body fatigued by exertion and slowed down in all its vital processes by lack of oxygen. Somervell's description of the scene is simplest and best: "A god's view."

More by instinct than anything else, I pulled my camera out of my pocket. The photograph I took is pitifully inadequate.

I cannot enlarge on the bitterness of defeat. Those who have failed on Everest are unanimous in one thing: the relief of not having to go on outweighs all other considerations. The last 1,000 feet of Everest are not for mere flesh and blood. Whoever reaches the summit, if he does it without artificial aid, will have to rise godlike above his own frailties and his tremendous environment. Only through a Power within him and without him will he overcome a deadly fatigue and win through to success.

Descending even difficult ground at high altitudes is almost as easy as descending at an Alpine level, and within a few minutes I regained the great couloir. Recrossing it, I halted on the broad, comfortable ledge to take a photograph. It is curious that I did not remember taking this photograph or the one from my highest point until the film was developed, so I think my action at the time was more automatic than reasoned, as before starting on the expedition I told myself

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many times that I must take photographs whenever possible. This lends colour to a theory I have long held, that in climbing at great altitudes, when mind and body are in the grip of an insidious lethargy, it is on the subconscious, rather than the conscious, that the climber must rely to push him forwards. Therefore, it is essential that the will to reach the summit of Everest be strengthened by a prior determination to get there. Perhaps it is not too much to say that Everest will be climbed in England.

After taking this photograph it occurred to me that I ought to eat something. I was not in the least hungry, indeed the thought of food was utterly repugnant, especially as my mouth was almost dry, and my tongue leather-like, but in duty bound I pulled a slab of mint cake from my pocket.

And now I must relate the curious incident described in "Everest 1933."

After leaving Eric a strange feeling possessed me that I was accompanied by another. I have already mentioned a feeling of detachment in which it seemed as though I stood aside and watched myself. Once before, during a fall in the Dolomites, I had the same feeling, and it is not an uncommon experience with mountaineers who have a long fall. It may be that the feeling that I was accompanied was due to this, which, in its turn, was due to lack of oxygen and the mental and physical stress of climbing alone at a great altitude. I do not offer this as an explanation, but merely as a suggestion.

This "presence" was strong and friendly. In

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its company I could not feel lonely, neither could I come to any harm. It was always there to sustain me on my solitary climb up the snow-covered slabs. Now, as I halted and extracted some mint cake from my pocket, it was so near and so strong that instinctively I divided the mint into two halves and turned round with one half in my hand to offer it to my "companion."

It was apparent when I recrossed the couloir that I would do better to return across the yellow band by a lower route. The angle of the band west of the first step is very slightly concave, and on such slabs a degree or two in angle makes all the difference. The western end of the band terminates below in a great cut-off, a sheer precipice which carries the eye in a single bound to the Rongbuk glacier. My return route lay a few yards above and parallel to the edge of this precipice. There was no difficulty whatsoever. Care alone was needed, especially when crossing some patches of snow which, unlike those on the upper part of the band, were treacherously soft and unstable.

Very soon I found myself below the point where I had parted from Eric, but on looking up, could see no sign of him. I now had to make the choice between climbing up at least 100 feet and joining the ascending route or of traversing directly to the camp. To ascend again at this stage was utterly distasteful. I was too tired, and my legs were leaden; they would descend easily enough or traverse horizontally, but I doubt whether I could have dragged them uphill unless hard pressed. A temptation I had to resist firmly was to slant off

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down the yellow band by Norton and Somervell's route. This was a far easier line than the long, wearisome traverse across a series of shelving ledges to Camp 6. In two or three hours I could have reached Camp 5, even continued on down to the comfort of the arctic tent at Camp 4. Unfortunately, Eric was waiting for me at Camp 6, and if I did not turn up he would naturally assume an accident.

The climbing was simple enough at first, but presently became more difficult. Instead of the easy slabs, which had led us upwards from the camp to the foot of the first step, I found myself on a series of narrow outward-sloping ledges separated by abrupt little walls. These ledges were never continuous for long, and it was necessary when one petered out to descend to another. However, I could still afford to lose height without descending below the level of Camp 6.

This route took me across the band some distance below the place where Wyn and Wagers found the ice axe, but I did not see any further traces of Mallory and Irvine. I remember glancing down at a wide, gently sloping expanse of snow, scree and broken rocks below the band and thinking that if the ice axe indeed marked the point where they slipped, it was possible that their bodies might have come to rest there.

Some of the ledges were wider than others, and I paused to rest at intervals. It was during one of these halts that I was startled to observe an extraordinary phenomenon.

Chancing to look over the north-east shoulder, now directly in front of me, I saw two dark objects

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in the sky. In shape they resembled kite balloons, and my first reaction was to wonder what on earth kite balloons could be doing near Everest, a certain proof that lack of oxygen had impaired my mental faculties; but a moment later I recognised this as an absurd thought. At the same time I was very puzzled. The objects were black and silhouetted sharply against the sky, or possibly a background of cloud; my memory is not clear on this point. They were bulbous in shape, and one possessed what looked like squat, under-developed wings, whilst the other had a beak-like protuberance like the spout of a tea kettle. But what was most weird about them was that they distinctly pulsated with an in-and-out motion as though they possessed some horrible quality of life. One interesting point is that these pulsations were much slower than my own heart-beats; of this I am certain, and I mention it in view of a suggestion put forward afterwards that it was an optical illusion and that the apparent pulsations synchronised with my pulse-rate.

After my first reaction of "kite balloons" my brain seemed to function normally, and so interested was I that, believing them to be fantasies of my imagination, I deliberately put myself through a series of mental tests. First of all I looked away. The objects did not follow my vision, but when my gaze returned to the north-east shoulder they were still hovering there. I looked away again, and by way of a more exacting mental test identified by name a number of peaks, valleys and glaciers. I found no difficulty in Chö-oyu, Gya-chung Kang, Pumori and the Rongbuk glacier,

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but when I again looked back the objects were in precisely the same position.

Nothing was to be gained by further examination and, tired as I was with the apparently endless succession of slabs, I decided to carry on to Camp 6. I was just starting off when a mist, forming suddenly, began to drift across the north-east shoulder. Gradually the objects disappeared behind it. Soon they were vague shadows, then, as the mist thickened, they disappeared altogether. The mist only lasted a few seconds, then melted away. I expected to see the objects again, but they were no longer there; they had disappeared as mysteriously as they came.

Was it an optical illusion or a mirage? It may be of interest to state that my height was about 27,600 feet, and that the objects were a few degrees above the north-east ridge about half-way between the position of the 1924 Camp 6 and the crest of the north-east shoulder. This gives their height as about 27,200 feet, and a line connecting me with them would have ended, not in a background of sky, but of clouds and mountains. It is possible, therefore, that imagination magnified some strange effect of mist, mountain and shadow, yet whatever they were, it was a strange and altogether uncanny experience.

The first light mist was a forerunner of other mists which quickly gathered and drifted across the mountainside, concealing familiar landmarks. It might not be easy to find Camp 6 among the wilderness of slabs in a mist, and I began to feel anxious, especially as I could not see the tent. Fortunately, however, two prominent towers on

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the north-east ridge, which I knew were directly above the camp, showed now and then.

In places the sandstone slabs were intersected horizontally by slippery belts of quartzite. The first intimation I had as to how slippery they were was when I lowered myself down a steep little wall on to an outward-sloping quartzite ledge. It was far more slippery than the sandstone ledges, and I did not dare trust my bootnails upon it. There was no alternative but to climb up to a sandstone ledge, and this ascent, though it cannot have been more than 20 feet, made me realise how tired I was.

Presently the two rock towers were almost immediately above me and I halted and looked round expectantly for the camp. It was still not visible. Was I above it or below it? Had my route-finding been at fault? All about me was a vast labyrinth of outward-dipping slabs. Now and then a puff of icy mist would float out of space and pass djinn-like up the mountainside to the crest of the north-east ridge where it shredded out and rushed away to join in the ceaselessly moving vapour that boiled upwards and outwards from the south-east precipice.

A few more steps. There was something familiar now about the rocks. Suddenly I came to a shallow, gently sloping gully filled with snow. There were footmarks in the snow; it was the gully immediately above the camp. Next instant I saw the little tent snugly bedded in a corner; small wonder I had not seen it before. What a relief! I let out a hoarse croak of joy and quickly scrambled down to it.

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Eric was there. It scarcely needed a word on my part to tell him of my failure; he had seen enough to gauge the conditions. He had descended without difficulty and his stomach was much better. We both talked in whispers, for my mouth and throat had been dried up by the cold air. A hot drink was the first thing; I had not known how thirsty I was, for the intense desiccation of high altitudes takes the body a stage beyond the mere sensation of thirst. And the warmth of it; there was life in that drink.

We discussed plans. Now that we had failed our one desire was for comfort, and there was no comfort at Camp 6. Eric was well rested and strong enough to descend to Camp 5; I, on the other hand, felt very tired; that hour of climbing beyond the great couloir had taken it out of me more than many hours of ordinary climbing. We agreed, therefore, that Eric should descend whilst I remained at Camp 6 and descended next morning. It was not a good arrangement; men should not separate on Everest, but another miserable night wedged together in that little tent was not to be borne.

An hour later, at about 1.30 p.m., Eric left. The weather was fast deteriorating; mists had formed above and below and a rising wind was beginning to raise the powdery snow from the face of the mountain. For a few minutes I watched him methodically traversing the sloping shelf, following Jack Longland's descending route; then a corner hid him from sight and I lay back in my sleeping-bag for a much-needed rest.

For the next hour I lay semi-comatose from

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fatigue; I may even have slept. Then I became suddenly conscious of the tent shuddering violently in a high wind. The rest had refreshed me greatly and my brain was beginning to reassert itself over my tired body. I unlaced the tent flaps and looked outside. A blizzard was blowing; nothing was to be seen but a few yards of slabs over which the snow-laden gusts rushed and twisted. Rapidly the wind increased. I could feel the little tent rising and straining against the guy ropes, and in between the thudding and cracking of its sorely stressed cloth hear salvos of driven snow spattering viciously against it.

Eric? I was very anxious. He must be having a horrible descent. He would do it all right; he was not one to associate with mountaineering accidents; his calm, detached confidence was a passport to safety in itself. Still, I could not rid myself of anxiety or of a succession of futile yet worrying pictures that flashed through my mind: snow and wind; wind, relentless, battering, snow-filled wind; wind as cold as death; and a lonely, toiling, ice-encrusted figure.

Towards sundown the wind fell appreciably and the clouds blew clear of Everest. Again I looked outside. Every other peak was concealed beneath a roof of clouds stretching in every direction. At that level a tempestuous wind was blowing and now and then a mass seethed upwards as though violently impelled from below and shrivelled into nothingness. The sky above was blue-green, never have I seen a colder colour, and the declining sun was entirely without warmth. Now and then little twisting devils of wind-driven snow

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scurried past: small wonder that the Tibetan believes in a cold hell; here were its very flames licking across the slabs of Chamalung.

There was little fuel left and half of it went to cook my supper. It was 6 p.m. when I had finished. I exulted in my comfort. There were now two lots of sleeping-bags to keep me warm and I was soon snug with enough below me to defeat the sharpest stone. It did not occur to me that I was spending a night higher than any other human being; I was purely animal in my desire for warmth and comfort. Neither did I feel in the least lonely; in this respect it seemed as natural to spend a night alone in a tent at 27,400 feet as in an hotel at sea-level.

I remember nothing more until the following morning. Something heavy was pressing on me when I awoke, and I was astonished to find a snowdrift covering the lower half of my body, reaching almost to the ridge of the tent. How had it got there? Then I remembered a small hole which Eric and I had accidentally burnt in the side of the tent during our cooking operations. It was only an inch or so in diameter, yet large enough for the powdery snow to pour ceaselessly through all night like sand through an hour glass, gathering in a drift which filled nearly a quarter of the tent. There must have been a more than usually severe blizzard.¹

I looked at my watch: 7 a.m.; I had slept the clock round for the first time since leaving the Base Camp, if not for the first time during the

¹ The weather both at Camps 5 and 4 was very violent that night.

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whole expedition. And I was greatly refreshed; as long as I lay without moving I felt almost as though I were at sea-level; my heart was beating slowly, steadily and rhythmically, and my brain was more active than it had been since leaving Camp 4. Perhaps I might be able to settle once and for all the vexed question of the second step before descending to Camp 4. With this idea in my mind I heaved myself up into a sitting position and began energetically to push away the snow. Instantly the familiar panting supervened, and at the same moment I was aware of the intense cold, the greatest cold I remember during the expedition. Within a few seconds sensation had left my hands and I had to push them into the sleeping-bag and put them between my thighs.

The sun had not yet reached the tent, possibly it was behind clouds, and it was useless to think of doing anything until it arrived. It struck the tent a few minutes later, and putting on my gloves I rummaged among the snow for fuel and provisions; it was some time before I found a tin, the last tin, of solid methylated and could prepare a cupful of café-au-lait. I loathed the sight of food, but I managed to force some down. Then I looked outside. One glance was sufficient: even if I had the strength or inclination (and the latter was now at a low ebb) for a reconnaissance, the appearance of the weather, to say nothing of the lack of fuel, made an immediate descent imperative. High grey clouds were stealing out of the west and overhead a formless murk was gathering in which the sun was struggling with fast diminishing power,

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whilst the freshly fallen snow had a dull, lifeless look. Another blizzard was brewing.

Collecting my few possessions together, I crawled outside and hooked together the flaps of the tent. Then crossing a snow slope I commenced to work along the shelf towards the north-east shoulder. One backward glance I took at the little tent: it looked strangely pathetic perched amid the desolate rocks and I felt almost as though I were abandoning a friend. It had served us well.

The air was calm and the monsoon clouds thousands of feet beneath almost stationary. This was fortunate as the shelf proved none too easy. The wind in the night had been too high to allow much snow to collect, but such snow as there was had firmly cemented the screes masking the slabs, and in places, where there were no screes, the slabs were thinly veneered with ice. It was the only time I had seen this disagreeable condition, known to Alpine mountaineers as *verglas*, above the North Col, and it may have been caused by the sun of the previous day warming the rocks so that the first snow melted and froze, or it may have been due to wind pressure.¹

¹ On thinking this matter over subsequently it has occurred to me that an increased humidity in the air due to the monsoon current may have been responsible. On the other hand, melting and freezing cannot take place on the north face of Everest, otherwise far more snow would adhere to it. That the air must always be extremely dry is borne out by the fact that the ice axe discovered by Wyn Harris and Wager was quite unrusted. Possibly, therefore, wind pressure alone may have been responsible. The hard icy snow on Norton's traverse can only have been formed by this, and it may be that sometimes it forms a glaze of ice on the rocks, especially when the air is

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Near the north-east shoulder the shelf petered out into a slope of soft powdery snow resting upon shelving slabs. Except that it was not so steep, it was a replica of the place beyond the great couloir. My first impulse was to descend as directly as possible, but I noticed that by descending diagonally across it I would come to some rocks leading down to the screes below the yellow band. The snow here had been little affected by the wind and covered the rocks two or three feet deep, and at every step I sank in above the knees. Also, like the snow beyond the great couloir, it was so loose that it could not have held me in the event of a slip, and I had an unpleasant feeling that the whole lot might pour off the slabs at any moment, carrying me with it.

After a very slow and careful descent, I reached a shallow chimney by the side of the rocks. The way now was obvious and relatively easy, and I paused for a rest. As I did so I saw a curious fuzziness in the north-west. Quickly it concealed the final pyramid and advanced along the slabs. Scarcely before I had time to realise what it meant, a gust of wind nearly blew me from my holds. Then came another gust and another, and before I had time to move a hurricane was raging.

moister than usual during the monsoon season. Even at high altitudes the monsoon air current must appreciably increase the percentage of humidity. In humid conditions wind alone is sufficient to plaster rocks with a thick coating of ice. Evaporation as well as wind plays a large part in keeping the north face of Everest free of snow and any ice glaze forming must soon evaporate. I doubt whether climbers will ever encounter ice on the rocks above the North Col prior to the advent of the monsoon air current, which in the present instance had undoubtedly reached the mountain.

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The situation changed with almost ridiculous suddenness. From climbing slowly, but reasonable comfortably in a still atmosphere, I was reduced to clinging on to the rocks for all I was worth, whilst great waves of wind tried to sweep me from the mountain.

Fortunately, easy ground at the foot of the yellow band was only about 50 feet below, and somehow or other I managed to climb down the rocks to it. But any relief I felt at treading a gentler slope was quickly offset by the hurricane. Muffled up though I was in all my clothing with two helmets on my head, it was impossible to face the driven snow, and with my goggles almost useless I could see little or nothing. So fierce was the wind that there were times when I could only progress on hands and knees, and even so I was several times swept from my balance and only managed to stop myself with my ice axe. All the malignity and intolerance of Everest were concentrated in that withering blast. And the cold was proportional to the wind, the most paralysing cold I have ever known. It was not content merely to numb my hands and feet, it seized my whole body in a merciless grip.

I have a dim memory of passing the foot of the yellow pinnacle above the 1924 Camp 6 and of bearing instinctively to the right towards the crest of the north ridge. Here with nothing to break its rush, the wind was at its worst, and for minutes at a time progress was impossible. I could feel a kind of deadness creeping up the lower half of my body, something I had never known before, and I remember thinking vaguely that the end would

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come when it reached my heart. My legs were stiff too, and seemed scarcely to belong to me. The struggle could not be kept up for much longer.

Suddenly I found myself on the crest of the north ridge and in a familiar place. A few feet below me was the ledge where Eric and I had rested during our ascent to Camp 6; the only place sheltered from the wind.

Slowly and stiffly I half climbed, half slid down to it. There was no wind there and I could actually feel the sun shining dimly through the clouds of wind-driven snow.

For a while I sat too numbed and exhausted to move. Then I began to beat and kick my lifeless hands and feet together. Slowly the dead feeling left my body and circulation painfully returned except to my finger-tips and feet, which no amount of kicking could restore to life.

It was astonishingly warm on the ledge, but on the crest of the ridge above me the wind roared ferociously, striking the rocks now and then with a noise like a thunderclap and the clouds of wind-driven snow whirled over my head.

Half an hour later the first fury of the storm had spent itself and I was ready to face the remainder of the descent. I would have remained longer, but the sun had disappeared and with it the warmth.

It was an effort to clamber back over the ridge and endure the wind again. To follow the ridge was impossible, and after passing the remnants of the 1924 Camp 6 I kept below it to the west where the wind was not so strong; even so I had fre-

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quently to cling on to the rocks to prevent myself from being blown away, and progress was very slow, especially as the rocks are steeper here than those above the camp. Providentially, the wind lessened considerably as I lost height. At about 26,000 feet it was blowing nothing worse than an ordinary gale and visibility had improved to such an extent that there was no risk of missing Camp 5 as I had feared at one time.

Progress should have been more rapid, but if anything it was slower. I was very tired and every wall and slab took a long time to negotiate. By the time the tents of Camp 5 came into view I was descending at a snail-like pace and my legs seemed scarcely to belong to me. I was about 300 feet above the camp when I first saw it, and was just congratulating myself on the prospect of rest, shelter and a hot drink when two figures emerged from one of the tents. I shouted and waved, but even in my own ears my voice sounded a thin, hoarse wail. They did not hear me; instead, and it was tragic to watch, they busily set about collapsing the only tent left standing.

I shouted again, angrily this time—fate was playing me a scurvy trick—but they neither looked up nor heard me, and a minute or two later set off down to Camp 4 and vanished from sight.

Cursing bitterly, I continued, and it may have been due to this disappointment but I experienced considerable difficulty in descending some steep slabs interspersed with abrupt little walls. There was one place in particular which I remember vividly where I had to let myself down by the

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arms on to a snow-covered slab in an angle of which was a bed of hard snow. The lower part of the slab was too steep to descend and I had to cut steps down the snow; it was all I could do to cut them, and they cost me much of my dwindling reserve of strength. Once at the camp and with nothing but the easiest of scrambling before me I decided not to halt and re-erect the collapsed tent, but to continue the descent to Camp 4. I learned later that if I had looked inside the tent I should have found a "thermos" of hot tea which Bill had considerably left there.

I was feeling considerably stronger now, owing no doubt to the loss of altitude, and the only thing that bothered me was a curious weakness in my legs, which had developed an annoying habit of giving way under me every few yards. The strange part of it is that I do not remember feeling tired, yet I staggered down the rocks like a Saturday-night "drunk."

A miserable descent: well-known landmarks were reached and passed with nightmare-like slowness: a small piece of red bunting; two big blocks of rock; Finch's 1922 camp with its tattered green canvas and scattered oxygen cylinders.

At last the top of the long snow slope; and there I was cheered by seeing some figures issue from the two blister-like arctic tents at Camp 4 and begin slowly to mount the ridge.

It was easy enough descending now, but I could not glissade in my weak condition and had to follow the rock crest all the way, and an incredibly laborious crest it seemed. However, my legs were in better shape; I rested rather than collapsed

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every few yards, yet, paradoxically, I felt tireder than before, and the explanation of this must lie in the difference between ordinary physical tiredness and exhaustion due primarily to altitude.

Of those who ascended from the camp some stopped with Eric and Bill to assist them down, whilst one came on for me, and after climbing some distance up the ridge halted to wait for me. When I got to him I saw it was Jack. He was half frozen, but he greeted me cheerfully and produced a "thermos" full of hot tea laced with brandy. The effect was nothing short of miraculous, and within a minute or two my whole body was charged with warmth and renewed strength. Thenceforward there was no need to halt and I was able to keep going continuously.

What a scene when at last we popped our heads in at the arctic tent. Eric and Bill were there in their sleeping-bags, both very tired, whilst Willy was bustling about preparing hot drinks and food, and in general doing all he could for everyone.

In a minute or two my ice-stiffened windproofs and boots were off and my dead feet were being energetically rubbed by a porter. I had not escaped unscathed. Some toes were frostbitten and all my finger-tips were without feeling. Time would show the extent of the damage.

Not content merely to cook and supply food and hot drinks, Willy examined us all. He declared me to be perfectly sound except for frostbites, that my pulse-rate was only 62, and that my heart showed no signs of strain. Meanwhile Jack tele-

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phoned the news of our arrival and our failure to Camp 3. Hugh would be glad to hear we were safely down, far too glad to worry about our failure; still it was terribly hard luck not to be able to send back better news to England. For the moment Everest had won. There was no one else fit enough for another attempt. We had shot our bolt and must go down for a rest. Perhaps, with luck, we should have another crack later.

There were a number of oxygen cylinders in the tent and as an experiment I dosed myself with the gas. As I was now acclimatised to a far greater height, the only beneficial effect was a slight increase of body warmth. Apart from this it made my throat drier and sorer than ever, and I was glad to remove the mask from my face.

Eric had had a terrible descent from Camp 6. The wind was so fierce that at one point he was tempted to return. Fortunately he decided to struggle on; he could never have fought his way back across the yellow band in the teeth of the hurricane. Lower, on the awkward slabs above Camp 5, which had given me so much trouble, he was nearly killed when a patch of snow gave way beneath him as he was lowering himself on to it from an abrupt little wall. He could find no foothold and had to haul himself back, a supreme effort to an exhausted man at that altitude. He reached Camp 5 absolutely played out.

Although it was a stormy night and snow battered the tent, we slept the sleep of exhaustion, all save Bill, who was in severe pain. How he stuck it out alone at Camp 5 I do not know; the strain had told on him severely and he was frostbitten

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in both feet and fearfully emaciated. Everest had had the last word and we were a very worn-out party; I doubt whether any of us could have survived more than a day or two longer at or above Camp 5.

CHAPTER XVI

RETREAT

THE MORNING OF JUNE 3RD WAS REASONABLY CALM though it was blowing hard on high and the usual sheets of snow were tearing across Everest. After breakfast our first job was to collapse the two arctic tents, leaving sufficient food and oxygen apparatus in them for another attempt, should this prove possible.

Willy, now a sick man, was very unsteady on the sharp crest of the Col and tottered along scarcely able to keep his balance. In one respect we were lucky; no avalanches had occurred as yet on the slopes of the Col, though it was obvious that with the new snow accumulating and the strengthening of the warm monsoon air current they must be expected in the near future.

At the site of the first Camp 4 we were surprised to meet Shebby. It had always been his ambition to reach the North Col and that day he realised it, a fine performance for a man of his age. He had brought up a number of porters and it was thus possible to retrieve everything except the tents, food and equipment for the next attempt.

On the rope ladder and the slopes below it Willy

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petered out completely and required continual assistance. Eric too was in poor shape. He had a terrible headache, due he thought to sun glare, which so affected him that he was incapable of coherent speech. It was a descent of broken men.

Tired as we were ourselves, it was not the occasion to stand on ceremony, and when we had supported Willy between us to the lower slopes and all danger was over we let go of him and he shot down the snow to the glacier like a sack of coals. It did not occur to me then what a brutal thing it was to do. Afterwards we had almost to carry him into Camp 3a, where we were greeted by the grinning Nursang, who had thoughtfully prepared a meal. We left him there to be brought down later by some porters and carried on to Camp 3.

Eric was still very queer whilst Bill was on the point of collapse, and it was a sick little procession that trailed into camp. I shall never forget the greeting we had from Hugh and the others; it made everything we had gone through, even our defeat, worth while. After the high camps, Camp 3 was a Capua of comfort and luxury and soon we were stretched out in the arctic tent, imbibing hot drinks and being pampered in every possible way.

Willy arrived later after being helped down by two porters. He was fighting for breath; there was something very wrong with his lungs and heart. Eric too was temporarily knocked out, whilst it was obvious that Bill, apart from his frostbitten feet, which were paining him greatly,

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would not be fit to go high again; he was a mere shadow of his former self.

Wyn and Waggars were among those at Camp 3, and we heard about their descent from Camp 6. Wyn had a very narrow squeak when attempting to glissade down a short humpbacked snow slope near Camp 5. The snow was so hard that he lost control and began to slide towards the 4,000-foot precipice falling to the East Rongbuk glacier. It was a desperate moment, and he did the one thing possible to save himself by turning on to his face and driving the pick of his ice axe into the snow. It was a question whether he could stop in time, as he did not dare force the axe too deeply into the snow at first, otherwise it would have been snatched from his hand. He said he would always remember the little spray of snow flung up by the pick as it bit into the slope; it seemed an interminable time before he slowed down and stopped a few yards from the edge of the precipice.

There had been only one fatality, but a sad one—Policey. Eager to be in at the death, she had gone up to Camp 3a and had not been seen since. A crevasse must have engulfed her. Probably she wandered away from the camp and trod through a snow bridge. We hoped that her death was swift and merciful. She had been an institution, for all her shyness and independence, and we missed her.

These and many other things were related and discussed in the arctic tent that evening. What a change it was after miserable confinement in a small tent—cold, uncomfortable and with no

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interest in life beyond its immediate necessities. True, the wind was roaring outside in disappointed fury, as though baulked of its prey, but it was powerless to harm us now, it merely played an appropriate accompaniment to a happy reunion and a great occasion.

No expedition without some element of good fortune in attendance could have come through such weather as we experienced safely. Perhaps, as Wyn once suggested, we were not really alive, and it was merely a collection of ghosts, yet it was a queer kind of ghost that ate so many pickled walnuts, as he did that evening. We were alive, and "damned lucky" was the general opinion, though in our hearts we knew that luck was only another word for Providence. What a pleasant sound a "Primus" makes—I never realised how pleasant before. And the steaming chocolate; we could smell it again and taste it, incense was never sweeter, nectar never more gracious to thin, tired bodies. But there was something even sweeter than this—the knowledge that we had done our best; this elevated failure almost to success.

Of all parts Hugh's had been the hardest. Could any have guessed his feelings as he saw his climbers disappear into the clouds? Then no news save hour by hour a tale of storm from Camp 4, while he waited at Camp 3 doing nothing, because there was nothing he could do. A lonely task this leadership of an expedition, none can know how lonely save the leader himself, for his is the responsibility, his the blame when things go wrong. He is the Aunt Sally of thoughtless critics. In war and peace, in politics, and religion, it is always the

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same; the leader, never the led, must shoulder the responsibility and the blame.

There are lucky leaders and unlucky leaders, and I shall always remember Hugh Ruttledge as a lucky leader. Twice now he has led Everest expeditions in conditions of exceptional difficulty and danger, and he has brought them back safely.

Having compared experiences, our next thought was of the future. The party was in no condition at the moment for another attempt, and a wireless message from Raymond, who was at the Base Camp, strongly urged withdrawal. There were two schools of thought: one was in favour of descent to the Kharta valley for a complete rest; the other believed that a short rest at the Base Camp would suffice to make some of us fit for another attempt; it would also enable us to keep an eye on the mountain, which would be impossible from the Kharta valley. Wyn strongly supported this last scheme, doubtless because he and I were at the moment the two fittest, though he had strained his heart slightly. What we felt was—get it over one way or the other and go home. Whether or not an attempt could be made once the monsoon had broken remained to be seen. The matter was settled when Hugh pronounced in favour of the Base Camp scheme.

At this time I supposed I was the fittest, inasmuch as my heart was sound, whereas most of those who had gone above the North Col were suffering from enlarged hearts, but I was more badly frostbitten than the others, with the exception of Bill, and another attempt might result in

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the loss of some toes. However, "sufficient unto the day . . ." The main thing was a few days' rest at the Base Camp.

Next morning, June 4th, was the warmest we had so far experienced at Camp 3, and we toasted ourselves in the sun before starting for the Base Camp. Obviously the monsoon was close upon us, for only this could account for the lack of wind and the unusual warmth of the air.

It was a sad little procession down the glacier. Bill was quite broken up and could scarcely walk; his frostbitten feet were troubling him a great deal and were very painful. Eric was still suffering from his head, and with one or two others remained at Camp 3 for one more day. For the rest of us it was a pleasant stroll, except that my toes were beginning to bother me and sent sharp pangs of pain through my feet at every step.

Conditions were very different from what they had been when we ascended to Camp 3. Streams of water were running down the trough, and in one place a lake about a hundred yards long had formed. Its green waters, with a forest of giant ice pinnacles rising out of them, were a pleasant sight for eyes wearied with the glare of high altitudes. Most of us halted by it and lounged on the sun-warmed boulders.

Where the route left the trough a new route had been made by Lachman Singh, which brought us quickly across the glacier. At Camp 2 Lachman Singh was delighted to see us. It had been a lonely time for him, but he had done valuable work in supervising the dispatch of stores to Camp 3. Instead of a snow floor, there was now a little

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lake, whilst all the snow had melted from the vicinity of the camp, leaving scree. So delightful was it that Bill, who had only got there with considerable difficulty, decided to stop until Shebby arranged to have him carried down to the Base Camp. The remainder of us also spent the night there—a night which proved unexpectedly cold, so that more than once I woke shivering; there was not enough flesh left to keep me warm.

June 5th was another perfect day with little or no wind on Everest. If only we had been up there then perhaps we might have had better conditions and a greater measure of success.

After a leisurely breakfast, Wyn, Wagers, Jack and I strolled down to Camp 1, but it seemed a long way and the miles of scree were trying to my frostbitten toes. Yet any discomfort we may have had was more than compensated for by a descent to more genial levels. All our physical and mental senses, dulled by weeks of residence at high altitudes, were quickened; it was like emerging from a smoky ill-lit room into a sunny and fragrant garden. To the mountaineer descending from Everest:

“ The common air, the earth, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise.”

At Camp 1 the meal prepared for us by Nima Dorje tasted as a meal never tasted before. The effect on me was to make me forget my frostbitten feet and descend the remainder of the way to the Base Camp in an hour and twenty minutes.

What a bleak place the Rongbuk Valley had seemed when we left it, and now the air was moist

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and balmy and, miracle of miracles, shy little saxifrages and crucifers were peeping up from between the stones like clusters of forgotten stars.

Tommy was at the Base Camp to welcome us, and he had a gargantuan feast ready, luxuries he and Smidge had ordered from Darjeeling. Our appetites had returned and we suddenly realised that we had starved for the past weeks. We sat down in the mess tent and guzzled shamelessly. Fresh mutton and fresh vegetables from the Sola Khombu valley, turnips and onions: fresh food after living for weeks on "tinned muck"; words cannot describe the beatitude of that meal.

George was also at the Base Camp. Poor chap, he was very ill with his gastric ulcer. To one so full of life and energy it had been past all bearing to miss it all.

Nima Tendrup greeted me full of smiles; I learned that after doing well at Camp 3, and even carrying to Camp 4, he had been taken ill and had been sent down to the Base Camp.

That night I slept warmly, comfortably and soundly, a sleep untroubled by the fitful waking periods that had become a part of life at high altitudes, and did not wake until the sun was well up and old Nima Tendrup was ready with a cup of tea and my hot washing water. But the supreme climax came after breakfast when I had a hot bath, my first for many weeks. What a blessing to rid the skin of the ingrained dirt. I remember thinking as I wallowed in it, that it marked the end of a stage. What of the future?

CHAPTER XVII

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RAYMOND WAS RIGHT TO URGE A WITHDRAWAL TO the Base Camp. At Camp 3 we felt that another attempt might be possible after a short rest, but the Base Camp supplied a necessary contrast which enabled us to take stock of ourselves and the situation. Of those who had gone high only Eric and I had sound hearts. Bill was a wreck and both he and Willy had to be carried down the glacier. Willy especially was very ill, though he had only been to the North Col, and Raymond diagnosed a patch of pneumonia on one lung; he was given oxygen for many hours on end. Eric, on the other hand, although a sick man when he arrived at Camp 3, should recuperate quickly, and the same might be said of Wyn if only his heart would stay "put" when it returned to normal. Wagers had strained his heart badly, but he was a tough fellow and there was no knowing what he might do. The same applied to Jack, who, although, like everyone, he was many pounds down in weight, had "guts" to the nth degree. Ferdie and Tom were obviously ready

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for more work even after their strenuous efforts on the North Col—a gruelling, unselfish job. Lastly, Hugo's leave had expired and he had gone post-haste to Darjeeling before the attempts on the summit.

As for myself, although my heart was sound and I felt fit enough for another attempt, I was, like everyone else, very thin. I shall never forget my first complete view of myself as I sat in a bath the morning after our arrival at the Base Camp. I could nearly encircle a thigh with the thumb and fingers of one hand. As someone suggested, we ought to take a photograph of ourselves and send it to the newspapers as "Starving Russian Refugees." The effect of prolonged residence at high altitudes—we had spent a month above 21,000 feet—had been to reduce not only flesh but muscle, and I suffered badly from muscle collapse in my legs, and for the first day or two could walk only a few yards at a time. It was probably this more than anything else that made my descent from Camp 6 such a rickety affair. Yet, according to Raymond, I had lost less flesh than most people. As regards my frostbitten toes, the two big ones were the worst. They were nearly black and one was full of pus, but Raymond told me I should lose only the nails. Fortunately my fingers were not bad, though the tips were raw and painful. Why I was not more badly frostbitten during my descent from Camp 6 I do not know. Good boots, and my habit of moving my toes about inside them, were primarily responsible.

Altogether there was no disguising the fact that the odds were several thousand to one against our

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reaching the summit, even supposing that conditions proved possible and there was a break in the monsoon. Our descent to the Base Camp had coincided with the arrival of the moisture-charged monsoon clouds; they had wrapped themselves about Everest and within a day or two the mountain was like a sugar cake with scarcely a rock visible. According to the inhabitants of Rongbuk the mountain would remain like this for the next three months at least, then it would smoke and smoke for weeks as the north-west wind reasserted itself and blew it black again. The sun could have little to say in the matter, otherwise the snow would consolidate and Everest would turn into a snow mountain permanently, so the snow above a certain level, probably that of the North Col, must remain powdery, and in such a condition the mountain is inaccessible. Our one hope, therefore, was that there would be a break in the monsoon coinciding with a strong wind which would temporarily clear the mountain of snow.

On June 12th Bill, George and Willy left the Base Camp for Chö-Dzong where a hospital camp was being established. At this lower level they should recover more easily than at the Base Camp. Poor George was very depressed, but derived some consolation from the fact that the mountain was unlikely to be attempted again for some time at least. We were seated in the mess tent when he said: "I don't mind going, for you're not going to get up, and I'll tell you why—the weather's too bad." At this there came in a hoarse whisper from Eric, who was still almost speechless, "I never thought of that." It was

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indeed what Mr. Punch would call "a glimpse of the obvious." Our hopes were at zero.

On June 11th Ferdie and Tom left to reconnoitre the North Col and if possible reopen the route to Camp 4, and on the 13th Hugh, Raymond, Eric, Jack and Tommy followed. A week at the Base Camp had worked wonders. Good food, and long refreshing sleep had revived interest, hope and energy. Some had even bathed in a pool of icy water and all had spent lazy hours revelling in the sun and the warm, moist air.

The following day Wyn and I set off to Camp 1. We both felt astonishingly fit; Wyn's heart had apparently returned to normal and the muscular weakness had left my legs; my frostbitten toes alone annoyed me. The weather was typical of the monsoon with high clouds beating up from the south, concealing Everest and the head of the Rongbuk glacier, and snowstorms every afternoon.

We reached the camp in two hours, having walked at almost sea-level pace, where we were welcomed by Bahardur Gurung, who had some tea ready. It was a beautiful afternoon with scarcely a breath of wind, but occasional fleeting snow showers reminded us that the monsoon was active and that in all probability snow was accumulating deeply on Everest.

Nima Dorje cooked us a good supper, and when we turned in the night was so warm that my tent seemed positively stuffy and I could not sleep except with both door flaps wide open.

An unclouded sky next morning roused our latent optimism. Was there really a chance of a

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break in the monsoon? I wished I could feel as optimistic in my heart as I pretended to be; many days of fine weather would be necessary to clear the snow from Everest.

Three hours' easy going in still, warm air brought us to Camp 2, and the porters arrived only a few minutes later; they were in splendid form and as eager as we for their revenge if only conditions allowed.

Once again I slept badly at Camp 2. Though perfectly acclimatised, I felt much as I did when I first reached this altitude. It seemed a critical height with me and above it or below it I always felt fitter. As I lay experimenting with all the usual sleep-wooing artifices, I noticed a light in Wyn's tent; he too was wakeful.

Before continuing to Camp 3 we examined Everest through the telescope. There appeared to be as much snow on it as on an Alpine peak in mid-winter, and here and there were avalanche tracks, long, narrow furrows suggesting slips of loose, powdery snow, particularly on the slabs of the yellow band and Norton's traverse. The tent at Camp 6 was still standing but looked as though it were practically buried. The result of this examination was a renewal of pessimism. Only a sprinkling of snow was needed to render the slabs impassable, and now there was at least two or three feet of the very worst kind of snow, and there was as yet no sign of any break in the monsoon.

Snow began to fall soon after we left the trough and fell more and more heavily as we approached Camp 3. Those ahead of us were congregated in

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the arctic tent and the first news we heard at the camp was that Ferdie and Tom had failed to reach Camp 4 owing to dangerous snow conditions on the slopes of the North Col. They had managed to excavate the lower ropes, but those above the crevasse were buried beneath several feet of snow. An avalanche had swept over the rope ladder and the snow in the punch-bowl was too unsafe to meddle with.

After some discussion it was decided provisionally to remain at Camp 3 till the end of the month. If a break in the monsoon occurred it might be possible to reopen the North Col route by climbing it at night when the snow was safely frozen, but I do not think any of us seriously believed there was any chance of attempting the mountain for several weeks at least.

It was still snowing when I went to bed, and snow continued to patter on my tent until long after midnight; I knew this because I was kept awake for part of the night by my aching frost-bitten toes, whilst later I was awakened by the thunderous roar of an avalanche.

Next morning, June 17th, was fine. The mornings are usually fine during the monsoon season, and it is not until midday that clouds gather and snow begins to fall. The porters were all very cheerful and there were unlimited volunteers anxious to go high again. Perhaps the bonus was an incentive; those who went to Camp 5 got 30 rupees each, and those to Camp 6 60 rupees. News was received by wireless from Smidge at the Base Camp that Willy had got pleurisy. If it was serious Raymond would have to descend, which

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meant weakening the party still further.

All the afternoon and evening snow fell heavily on Everest, but the clouds dissolved during the evening, and when I turned in the sky was alive with stars and the Milky Way was hung like a spectral banner across them, whilst from the south came an uneasy flickering of sheet lightning. Owing to a dull throbbing ache in my toes, I was unable to sleep, so for the first time I had a drug, allonal I think. This sent me to sleep for some hours, but I woke soon after midnight and remained awake until dawn. There is no doubt that this inability to sleep well at high altitudes is the most depressing factor in high-altitude mountaineering. A man must be tired by a hard day's work before he can sleep, and inactivity at high altitudes is wearing on physique and nerves.

Next morning, in perfect weather, Ferdie, Eric and Tom visited the Rapiu La, a col little if any higher than Camp 3, between the north-east ridge of Everest and a peak of 22,950 feet on the ridge separating the East Rongbuk and Kangshung glaciers. They reported a superb view of the south-east face of Everest and of Makalu and Chomolönzo.

So hot was the sun during the morning that the eye of faith perceived the snow melting from the rocks of Everest, but as usual clouds formed at midday and snow fell in the afternoon. A dreary time it was lying up every afternoon for hours on end in the arctic tent with nothing to do. The warm, moist monsoon air was rapidly healing our throats. Eric's voice had returned and he was making the best of it in an argument with Wyn

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on relationships in Kenya between planters and government officials. This argument lasted for hours on end and the protagonists returned to it each day like giants refreshed. It eclipsed all other arguments, and before its torrents of invective and abuse the rest of us remained silent except for an occasional sly dig of the partisanship poker when the fire showed signs of smouldering. The impression I formed of Kenya is that it is populated exclusively by government officials who make life as difficult as they can for planters, and planters who—but I cannot do justice in mere words to the iniquities of the planters.

Eric woke me next morning, just as it was getting light, and at five he, Hugh, Ferdie, Tom and I set off to the Rapiu La intending to climb the 22,950-foot peak to the north of it. An hour's easy walking took us to the col, where we were greeted by a marvellous view of Makalu and Chomolönzo. The latter peak reminded me of the Aiguille Verte possibly because to the left of it stands a huge rock pinnacle not unlike the Dru: magnificent, terrible mountains and apparently unclimbable, at all events from the west and north. Close at hand was the south-east face of Everest. There can be no more terrific series of ice cliffs and ridges in the world. One subsidiary ridge rises fully 7,000 feet from the Kangshung glacier in a sublime sickle-like curve of gleaming ice. Its crest is razor-like and from it fall other crests equally sharp, divided and subdivided into delicate flutings separating icy channels formed by the constant downrush of avalanches, which even at this early hour were falling one after the other with scarcely a pause,

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so that this vast mountainside seemed to stir and grumble uneasily in the searching rays of the sun.

In the far distance, south of the silver and blue snows of Kangchenjunga, a wall of dun-coloured monsoon cloud spanned the horizon and closer at hand a sea of woolly mist extending for scores of miles concealed the Arun valley and its tributaries, its topmost billows brilliant in the sun and the deeper troughs a dark brownish-purple.

The snow slopes of the 22,950-foot peak rise immediately to the north of the Rapiu La and after a short halt we set off to climb them in the hope of an even finer view. The snow was very soft and from its condition it was obvious that we must expect much the same conditions on and above the North Col—impossible conditions for climbing at high altitudes and dangerous because of avalanches on any but the gentlest of slopes. At every step we sank in up to the knees and the leadership changed hands at frequent intervals. There was no difficulty, and after an hour or so's hard work we arrived on the indeterminate summit of the mountain. The monsoon mists were rising, but between their sluggish folds there were enchanting glimpses of dark-green upland pastures thousands of feet beneath in the direction of the Kharta valley. Grass again; it seemed scarcely possible in this frigid land. Then, piercing the sluggish mists, the beautiful little peak of Khartse, 21,390 feet, stood draped in ice delicately modelled into thin flutings uniting in a precise summit.

But it was at Everest that we looked longest. From this direction the great north-east ridge is

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seen almost end on. It has its origin in the Rapiu La and rises 7,000 feet to the north-east shoulder and thence to the summit, a distance as the crow flies of nearly three and a half miles. Finch suggested it as a possible line of attack in 1922, but compared with the route so far attempted via the North Col and north ridge it would seem to have little to recommend it. Length alone is against it and too many camps would be required, whilst the difficulties, if not excessive in the first 2,000 feet, are obviously great below the north-east shoulder, whilst the shoulder itself with its spiky pinnacles might prove impassable. Still, it was intriguing to speculate on the possibilities of forcing a route. If Everest could be climbed entirely over a ridge an attempt in the monsoon would be justifiable, for Bauer and his Bavarian party had boldly attacked Kangchenjunga during this season and by overcoming great difficulties had proved it to be the best for tackling an ice ridge. But face climbing, particularly on a slabby face such as the north face of Everest, is impracticable in conditions of monsoon snow. Warmth and the absence of wind make the monsoon season ideal for mountaineering on peaks of moderate elevation, and it is a matter for regret that Everest cannot be attempted then, as the climber would meet with almost genial conditions and would seldom be exposed to the risk of frostbite or sudden wind storms.

Two weeks of reasonable weather between the ending of impossibly cold and windy winter conditions and the monsoon is all the climber can expect on Everest, and there will be seasons when

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he does not get even this.¹ The highest mountain of the world dictates its own conditions and the mountaineer would scarcely have it otherwise, for however much he may bemoan his luck, he knows in his heart that uncertainty is the spiritual essence of mountaineering.

We were beaten and Everest had no further use for us. Standing humbly on the summit of a peak nearly 23,000 feet high, we could only admire the beauty and splendour of our adversary. Everest had been hostile towards us and we had felt that there was something almost personal behind this hostility, in the bitter cold and sudden smiting storms. The thin air through which we had toiled so painfully had been imbued with some intangible quality opposing our progression, thwarting us with an insidious lethargy, blunting the fine edge of our first enthusiasm. We had felt we were unwanted; perhaps because we were unworthy.

But we could no longer associate our own puny qualities with Everest, for Everest had withdrawn from us and only our vision could win to that far summit where the clouds paced slowly.

There was no break in the monsoon. Day by day snow fell. Avalanches rumbled and smoked from Everest, and at nights soundless lightning set the south sky trembling. And the weather reports held out no hope. Nothing was to be gained through staying at Camp 3, and on June 21st we withdrew to Camp 2 and on the following day to the Base Camp. There, once again, our appetites

¹ As in 1936.

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returned and we slept. How we slept! I had never before appreciated properly this satisfying blessing of sleep. There was nothing to do but discuss the future. Was it worth while waiting on through the monsoon? This was argued *ad nauseam* by us all. And, meanwhile, Everest covered itself ever deeper in monsoon snow until only avalanche tracks were to be seen where boulders ten or fifteen feet high were known to exist. In the mornings the sun shone warmly and we stretched ourselves out on the warm turf where the saxifrages bloomed in their galaxies of starry blooms, but most afternoons clouds gathered, hail-storms trailed their slate-grey skirts over the hills and the silences of the Rongbuk valley were awakened by peals of thunder.

In the evenings there were other and unusual noises from the wireless tent; the Savoy Orpheans and the notes of Big Ben. A strange thing that all the world should be whispering over the solitudes of Tibet: with us the eternal rumble of the glacier torrent and the snows of Everest pale beneath the stars, and in England the multitudes of escaping workers hurrying over Westminster Bridge.

There was a case of champagne; we could not drink to success, so we celebrated Jack's birthday. Even at that height the corks flew skywards and champagne gushed out like a fountain; a pail was the only receptacle that coped with its exuberance.

Then, as we had half expected, the word came from England ordering our withdrawal; also a telegram from the King, who shared our disappointment and hoped we would have better luck next time.

THE FINAL ATTEMPT

Would there be a "next time"? It was a sad morning when our tents were collapsed; they seemed by now almost to have rooted themselves into the brown earth. Then, once more the long trains of lumbering yaks and thin-legged, quick-footed little donkeys, patient as always beneath their loads and the curses of their drivers; but this time Everest was behind us. Warm sun and deep-blue sky—it seemed absurd to leave.

A day later we said good-bye to the Lama of Rongbuk. Clouds, congregating at the head of the valley, concealed Everest. An hour later I looked back for the last time. The air was still and warm and filled with the scent of flowers which had everywhere sprung up between the stones. It was July 3rd. Two and a half months ago we had trudged up the track in the teeth of a bitter wind. There had been a powdering of snow on the ground and drifts across the path; Everest had risen starkly before us. And now, flowers and warm, moist air and Everest buried in snow. The great mountain was invisible, holding court to the clouds. It had let us all go; Providence had been kind. The old Lama of Rongbuk had prayed for our safety and his prayers had been answered.

And now we must think of the future. Perhaps one day we would tread again the stony path beneath the deep blue of the Tibetan sky and see that yellow pyramid with its white plume writing the endless message of the west wind.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

THE ICE AXE FOUND ON EVEREST

SO MUCH CONTROVERSY HAS RAGED AROUND THE ice axe discovered above Camp 6 that it may be of interest to restate the facts and the theories put forward to account for its presence. The axe was found about 60 feet below the crest of the north-east ridge and about 250 yards east of the first step, lying on the slabs unsecured by either ledge or crack and dependent on friction alone for its lodgment. Though an ice axe offers little resistance to the wind, it is astonishing that it should have remained there, for winds on Everest are known to exceed 100 miles per hour. It is quite likely, however, that nothing approaching such a velocity is reached near the surface of the slabs, and it is possible that the place where the axe was found is never visited by winds of hurricane force owing to the formation of the mountainside. How did the axe come there? It has been suggested that it was deliberately left there by Mallory or Irvine as it would impede their progress over the rocks to the summit. All who have climbed above 27,000 feet on Everest are agreed that an ice axe is necessary. Not only is it a useful prop when

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traversing the slabs, but it is essential when crossing patches of snow. Had Mallory and Irvine climbed the ridge they would have had to cross numerous snow patches, whilst on the north-east face of the final pyramid there is a snow slope several hundred feet high which might well provide a quicker and easier route to the summit than the rocks to one side which can only be reached by an awkward-looking traverse by a climber approaching the final pyramid over the second step. Lastly, the concluding section of the north-east ridge, i.e. the summit ridge of the mountain, consists of a snow and rock edge some 200 yards long which no mountaineer would dream of traversing without his axe. If Norton's route is followed an ice axe is even more essential. I had to cut a number of steps across beds of hard snow and across the great couloir. If I had reached the subsidiary couloir it would have been equally essential, whilst there are some large patches of snow on the north face of the final pyramid which the climber may have to climb or cross *en route* to the summit. Quite apart from its usefulness when crossing snow, I found it to be nothing short of a third leg on the outward-shelving ledges of the yellow band. No mountaineer of Mallory's calibre would have deliberately discarded so vital an aid to success.

Was the axe dropped accidentally? If so, the party could only have dropped it somewhere between the point where it was found and the ridge, and it would have been a simple matter to descend and recover it.

The most tenable theory is that the axe marks

THE ICE AXE FOUND ON EVEREST

the scene of a slip. The climbing is easy at this point, yet once a climber slips he would be unlikely to stop himself, and with a heavy oxygen apparatus on his back he would have no chance at all: it may be that the oxygen apparatus was the primary cause of the disaster, for unimpaired balance is necessary even on the easier slabs of the yellow band.

It is likely that the two were roped together; indeed, this may be regarded as certain, as Mallory would have considered it his duty to rope himself to his less experienced companion though he knew that in the event of a slip he was unlikely to hold him. They were traversing the slabs, in preference to the broken and probably more fatiguing crest of the north-east ridge, when one of them slipped. The other instinctively dropped or put his ice axe down and seized the rope in both hands in an endeavour to check the fall of his companion. He failed and was pulled off by the rope. This is no abstract theory. In 1934 I accompanied a party of guides on the south side of Mont Blanc in search of the bodies of two Oxford undergraduates. The first intimation we had of an accident was finding an ice axe marking the scene of a slip which occurred on rocks no more difficult than those at the point where the axe was found on Everest. The second man had discarded his ice axe in a vain attempt to stop the leader and had been pulled off.

Another debatable point is whether the accident to Mallory and Irvine occurred during the ascent or descent. If Odell saw them on the second step, then it occurred during the descent; yet in view

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of the difficulty of the ridge below the step and the formidable nature of the step itself it appears more likely that it occurred during the ascent and that Odell saw them on one or other of the two rock towers below the first step as already suggested.¹ In support of this theory is the unlikelihood of the first step yielding to direct assault from the ridge. It appears necessary to turn it on its north side, the south side being a sheer ice slope so far as is known. Now supposing the two were descending after having negotiated the first step, it is unlikely that they would traverse so near the crest of the north-east ridge, especially when Mallory must have been well aware of the line taken by Norton and Somervell which slants diagonally downwards across the yellow band (i.e. well below the point where the ice axe was found). A descending party on Everest is concerned to lose height as quickly as possible, and it is hardly likely that Mallory and Irvine would continue an almost horizontal and wearisome traverse on or near the crest of the north-east ridge when an obvious and quick route down the yellow band was open to them.

A last hypothesis. Supposing, like Norton and Somervell, they had been impressed by the apparent difficulty of the north-east ridge and the impossibility of carrying an oxygen apparatus weighing about 35 pounds up the nearly vertical cliff of the second step—a formidable proposition at sea-level and most likely an impossible feat at 28,000 feet, taking into account the clumsiness and inefficiency of the 1924 apparatus—and had fol-

¹ Page 232.

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lowed the traverse route, then it is practically certain that they would, like Norton and Somervell, have taken a lower line when descending and passed well below the point where the axe was found.

All mountaineers hope that Mallory and Irvine reached the summit of Everest, yet it cannot be denied that the facts are against their having done so. If, indeed, the ice axe marked the point at which an accident occurred, then it is possible that further traces may be found on the slope of broken rocks, snow and scree at the foot of the yellow band.